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The American reading public

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The American Reading Public

*A Symposium*



# The American Reading Public

*What it Reads*

*Why it Reads*

FROM INSIDE EDUCATION AND PUBLISHING:  
VIEWS OF PRESENT STATUS, FUTURE TRENDS

The *Daedalus* Symposium, with  
Rebuttals and Other New Material

EDITED BY *Roger H. Smith*



R. R. BOWKER, *New York*

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# Introduction

ROGER H. SMITH

THE AMERICAN READING PUBLIC—who are they? They are, in a sense, everyone but the very young and the very illiterate. They read tabloids and best sellers and are the *raison d'être* for the multi-million dollar advertising-in-print industry. They also read technical manuals, scientific reference works and highly specialized monographs. The range of what they read is as wide and varied as the range of human interests and human competence.

The American Reading Public, on its own initiative or through the institutions which it directly or indirectly supports, buys nearly \$2 billion worth of books every year. It buys approximately 270,000,000 copies of magazines every issue and more than 60,000,000 newspapers every day (and 48,000,000 on Sunday). Our civilization is such that reading is a *functional* necessity, no less than breathing and eating, and he who cannot read is a permanent cripple.

Universal public education in the United States has brought untold boons—and not a few problems. Given a few years of rudimentary reading instruction at the elementary school level, is a grown man, with no further formal education, competent to vote? Except in special situations, deplorably rigged on racial grounds, our society more favors the opportunities inherent in universal suffrage than the safeguards of a meaningful minimum test of literacy. So be it.

To this extent, then, practically everyone is a reader—of something, sometime.

This book, in seeking to define the nature of the American Reading Public and those who serve it, goes beyond this minimum concept of the reader. It is concerned with the person for whom reading is an act of engagement, whether for professional reasons or recreation or both: the student, the teacher, the executive—and the individual who inspires the fondest thoughts among publishers, the “faithful reader.” The twenty articles in this book (including the book review at the end) are about

this *engaged* segment of the American Reading Public. Some are written from within the publishing industry—by publishers and other practitioners. Others come from American higher education and are by interested and informed observers.

The idea for this book originated with the editors of *Daedalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, who devoted their winter, 1963, issue to the subject, "The American Reading Public." The twelve articles in the *Daedalus* issue, plus the review of "Catch-22," are reprinted here in full, with only minor corrections and additions which were requested by the authors. Added to those are seven articles which were specially commissioned for this book. In sum, they represent a definitive portrait of an important segment—perhaps the most important segment—of communications in America in the 1960's.

## *The American Reading Public*

BY STEPHEN R. GRAUBARD

Editor of *Daedalus*

PUBLISHING is a curious enterprise—a business for some, a vocation for others—its objectives defy easy definition. While the purpose of providing diversion for the reader need not conflict with that of instructing him, it is seldom that the two can be realized simultaneously. Since the printed word remains the primary device for learning, other “educational tools” having had by comparison only a limited effect, there is a powerful sentiment for judging the success of publishing in other than profit-and-loss terms. The values that govern in our society cannot but be reflected in our estimate of the worth of the vast quantity of material which pours from its presses.

This issue, devoted to “The American Reading Public,” expresses the deep concern which many in this country feel about the present state of publishing. If there are many criticisms, this is only partly a comment on inadequate performance; it is also a statement of the large expectations which are thought to be legitimate in this area. The dimensions of the problem are suggested by the great variety of subjects treated, but also by the necessity of seeking contributions from persons who are engaged in widely divergent activities but whose common concern is the printed word.





# 1

## Educating the Reader: From Grade School to Graduate School

LEARNING to read can be a wondrous revelation of new worlds and new sensations, or it can be a soul-searing exercise of endless repetition. ("Look. Look. See. See. Look and See.") However reading is taught, the textbook lies near the heart of the process. Frank Jennings, in the first article in this section, takes a look at the American textbook: its past; its present strengths and weaknesses; and its likely course of future development as textbook publishers respond to currents of change in American education.

Reuben A. Brower, in the second article, approaches the matter of Why Johnny Can't (or Can) Read from the standpoint of the methods and materials used in the teaching of reading. There is, tragically, a world of difference between the elementary-high school approach and the approach which the student will be expected to follow when he enters college, Mr. Brower believes.

Benjamin De Mott is worried about a phenomenon prevalent among undergraduates and graduates alike: the *passive* reader. Reading, according to Mr. De Mott, should mean involvement—"true contention, successful struggle."



FRANK G. JENNINGS

## *Of Textbooks and Trapped Idealists*

"NOW THAT," said the Renaissance gentleman, pointing a jeweled forefinger at the misapplied winepress, "that will put into a thousand clumsy hands a hundred evil volumes, and madness will be loosed upon the world." The gentleman was misquoting, in the style that is ever current among his breed of critics manqué, certain remarks that had recently been attributed to the secretary of Lorenzo the Magnificent, the good Politian, who had greeted, with controlled repugnance, the establishment of a printing shop in Florence by one Bernardo Cennini. The year was 1471.

Politian was a defender of culture, an enemy of the vulgar, of what we have been instructed to denominate as Masscult. He saw no virtue in giving to the commonality the opportunity to traffic in ideas or to deal with orderly facts. His descendants are still among us, but they have lost his style. They are tawdry creatures, given to the defense of the Post Office against the incursions of enterprising publishers of pornography-in-the-public-domain. Much as he resisted the advent of publishing as a mass medium, he would have been driven to eloquent prayer at the sight of an American textbook.

It is tempting to taste such rage. An educated adult, looking upon a modern American textbook for any grade in any subject, could easily see the work as an insult to the student's potential intelligence. So-called public reaction against the contemporary "look-say" basal readers is a case in point. Gutenberg must weep.

Organizations have been established and foundations have given their support to efforts to remove these blights from the American classroom. We know better than to tolerate what the worst of these books stand for. Consider the child who enters the first grade classroom, excited by the hope that at last he will learn to read on his own, coming as he does to the effort, with almost six years of marvelous success in learning how to use

his mother tongue. Consider this child who has a substantial vocabulary that makes it possible for him to report on and deal with complexities of experience in the modern world, now being confronted with a book that stutters a few score of infantile words, "Look, Jane, Look! Jack has the ball . . . See, see, see the ball!" Is this the magic of the printed page? Is this the place where heroes contend with ogres?

Consider the child who knows the difference between a rocket trajectory and a satellite orbit, who can distinguish among hundreds of brands of cereals, soaps and deodorants, who knows families of automobiles with mytho-poetic names; consider this and appreciate his disappointment. We offer him a cup of magic, filled with tap-water.

Certainly it is easy to denigrate textbooks. As *books*, they were never very good. Remember those of our own youth? They had no titles for us, only authors' names. In math class we opened the beige-colored monstrosity called "Wentworth & Smith," in English there was "Lang, Leaf, and Meyers." History was simply the forever "Muzzy." Each in its own way was a drudge-making curse. Remember the language of Molière served up to us in a stew called "Chardenal"? Remember those physics books that would have made Newton wince, that never recognized the existence of Einstein or Bohr or Planck?

How did we as a nation survive this assault? How did we, so armed, come through the Depression, fight a global war, sunder the atom and probe the domain of the stars? We have answers to these questions, and the textbooks do not figure in them. But, are we being fair?

A textbook is a book only in the generic sense. Physically it is sturdier than any other bound volume. Esthetically, if that is the proper word, it is just about as attractive as a mass-circulation women's magazine. It is an economic marvel. Nowhere else can so much, so well made, be sold so widely for so little. A textbook is usually the product, not of a single man's midnight agony, but of a committee's mid-afternoon kaffeeklatch. A textbook is an entrepreneurial response to an imagined teacher's probable need. It is an ingathering of pedagogical common sense about the way to order what should be taught at a certain grade level in a statistically average classroom to a generalized child.

Alfred North Whitehead once observed that it takes an unusually astute mind to explicate the obvious. In the matter of saying just what a textbook is, this explication is as varied as it is confusing. "Textbooks," says one publisher, speaking to an audience of his peers, "simply do not conform to

any standard pattern. . . . A basal textbook is a teacher talking to a student through the medium of printed language." What teacher, the one in the front of the room? At the same meeting, a senior editor of an old and often very successful company declared that a textbook is ". . . any printed material placed in the hands of a whole class or class group for the purposes of instruction." Samuel P. Hayes, president of the Foreign Policy Association, was quoted in *Publishers' Weekly* (April 8, 1963), as follows: "Textbooks are teaching materials. . . . But they are more than that. They are one door to a different way of life. They embody the rationalistic, pragmatic approach to the natural and social world that is the essence of the Western outlook and that is essential for the dynamic process we know as 'economic development.'"

Frank Redding, public relations director of John Wiley & Sons, also writing in *Publishers' Weekly* (March 18, 1963), says that ". . . a standard definition of a textbook is simply a 'course of study in print.'"

Wherever textbook people gather, be they authors, editors, publishers or any of the various educational laborers in the curricula vineyards, there will be talk of the product and its problems. Some recent entrants into the business boldly talk of the package. Some editors and publishers seem to be trapped idealists. They talk a hard business line about the nature of the market and how it is to be reached and managed, but they also talk about commitment to the democratic process and about their responsibility for helping to provide the best education for all American youth. They are sensitive to criticism, courageous and cowardly in turn, willing to gamble money and prestige—up to a point—in untried areas, and yet they are equally earnest in defending what they have done successfully and profitably for a long, long time.

Modern American textbook publishing, in spite of the demurrers, is big business. The American textbook is a mass medium, and the disabilities and advantages of these roles are apparent. One successful text or series can literally establish what amounts to a national curriculum in a given subject. This has been especially true in such fields as "beginning reading" but it is equally true in the sciences and even at the college level. Sidney J. French, dean of academic affairs at the University of South Florida, writing in the *Educational Review* of that institution (Vol. 1 #1, Spring 1963), offers this bit of history: "For more than half a century Alexander Smith's textbook in general chemistry, through successive editions, dominated the teaching pattern in chemistry. Successful books by American

authors merely followed the Smith pattern with minor variations. It took a person with the insight of Linus Pauling to break this pattern finally in the late 1930's. What has been done since has consisted of refinements of the Pauling pattern, which is now reaching down even into secondary school chemistry."

In elementary and secondary education, the phenomenon of the long-lived dominant text has been with us from the beginning of the common school. The famous blue-backed speller of Noah Webster sold over three million copies, according to the information printed in the "Thirtieth Revised Impression" published in Philadelphia in 1809. All told, over a hundred million copies of the speller were sold during the 19th century. The legendary McGuffey Readers sold over one hundred and twenty-two million copies by the middle of the 1920's and have in recent years been returned to print, not only as curiosities but even as working texts in some school systems.

Many of the characteristics of organization, design and services now commonly associated with textbooks were developed early in the 19th century. The course of study is clearly delineated, there are suggested or imperative study and teaching aids. Tests and test questions are provided for the student, and rudimentary manuals are provided for the teacher.

One feature present in almost all textbooks of this earlier time, which no publisher today would tolerate in books designed for use in public schools, was a strong moral and judgmental tone. Some of the current critics of textbooks deplore this modern lack and point to the McGuffeys with hope and longing. Regardless of the subject matter—be it spelling, arithmetic, grammar or geography—the old textbook writer spoke his mind and paraded his personal bias.

An 1810 geography text declared that "The Russian husbands are unkind and cruel to a proverb." An 1818 text spoke of the Irish as ". . . generally well-made, strong, active, haughty, careless of their lives, and greedy for glory; quick of apprehension, courteous of strangers, and often violent in their passions." Some later textbook writers spoke of the Irish in terms that would not be used by the most virulent white racist speaking of a Negro Freedom Rider. A very early text, written soon after the American Revolution, had this observation about England: "Her wealth and power have made her proud and haughty; and, in consequence, her fall, by many, is predicted to be not far distant." Sharply critical attitudes toward racial and religious minorities were the rule. It must, however, be remembered

that the chief aim of early American education was the teaching of morality and religion. A neutral or objective author would be an unread author.

There was another quaint feature in many of the early texts that disappeared with the emergence of advertising as one of the pillars of society. It was not at all unusual for a textbook to carry as many as two hundred signed testimonials to the virtues of the book and the merits of the author. Some publishers even cataloged other books and educational materials, not necessarily produced in their own plants. It is presumed that some form of compensation was arrived at in matters of this kind.

These comments are offered here in order to provide some background against which one might see more clearly both the problem of the changing roles of the modern textbook and its publisher. In passing it must be mentioned that "Old Textbooks," by John Nietz, published by the University of Pittsburgh Press in 1961, is a charming, if occasionally haphazard account of this history. A couple of hours with this book could dispel some of the cherished myths we maintain about the golden days. It could also demonstrate the source of some of the genius which has made textbook publishing the institution it is.

A book comes into being when some author, driven by his private daemon, brings forth a manuscript which some editor likes well enough to try to persuade a publisher to print. The book lives or dies by the size and loyalty of the readership it attracts. With textbooks it is otherwise. An editor, a publisher, a salesman, a successful teacher (or an unsuccessful one!), a curriculum specialist or a committee of many or all of these people may decide that a new textbook is needed or would succeed in a certain subject if it were done in a certain way.

Another avenue to textbook creation might open with a salesman's report that a competitor's product seems to be doing very well in his territory and that it has certain characteristics of size, shape, color, format or organization of contents. He strongly urges that his company go forth and do likewise. If he is a good salesman with a reputation for being right in these matters, his report will be considered with care and possibly favor. In either case, some one person's attention is piqued, and the process of textbook creation begins. It begins with a question in logistics.

Large textbook houses today have staffs that could provide a complete faculty for a fine education department in a good college. In fact many of the editors and other "specialists" are recruited from such faculties as

well as from the classrooms and administrative offices of the country's better school systems. These people maintain their professional credentials in the major educational organizations and often participate in workshops, conferences and conventions. It is their responsibility to keep alert to every shift in the educational climate, to identify the bright young Turks and encourage them, to establish and keep in close working contact with educational leaders, but perhaps their most important assignment is to keep the big series books and best-sellers ready for revision. The moneymakers are not the flashy one-shots but the long-term wheel-horses that dominate a field for a generation.

That big book or series is the product of what is loosely called research and development. (Everyone uses the phrase today, why shouldn't the publishers?) From the beginning of an idea to the final act of publication will be an intensively active period extending perhaps over six years. If what is being planned is a new series rather than a single text, a publisher's investment might be more than a million dollars by a very considerable amount. With investments in time and money on such a scale, a publisher has a clear responsibility to his stockholders to hedge his bets against the whole educational universe.

He will see to it that the book idea is tested in every conceivable way. He will even try it out on his wife and children. There will be brainstorming sessions at the beginning. A pulsating germ of an idea will be nourished to the point at which it can be paraded before some private audience, perhaps of working classroom teachers, perhaps before some trusted authors. If it is viable and shows the possibility of growth it will be worked up into a memorandum which will be presented to the editorial staff that would have the responsibility for the book or series, should it come into being. There the criticism can be rough, ruthless or ridiculous. But any observation, no matter how irrelevant or absurd, will be entertained. A tiny misjudgment can result in a feature that could destroy the work of years, or so it is thought by some editors and publishers. They have cause for such sensitivity.

If the idea survives the early trying stages, it grows quickly into a kind of scenario. Sections of the book-to-be are worked up. There will be numerous readings of this partial manuscript by various specialists. There will be field tests of special features or related ideas which, if successful, will later be incorporated into the final manuscript. Schools, and even whole school systems will be invited to cooperate in the venture. Usually,



they will be happy to do so. Everyone involved, at all levels of talent and responsibility, will be urged to seek out and report any apparent weakness in the text, in the logic of organization, and often (here is where the persistent sensitivity shows its anxious head again) most important, they are abjured to report on any possibility of any statement, illustration, or even a chart that could somehow cause some offense somewhere to someone.

This last point is crucial because the final act is a sale, but not any ordinary sale of a book over the counter. Textbook publishers need and want adoptions. They want system-wide adoptions. They hope for state-wide adoptions, though these are becoming rarer than they once were. A publisher of textbooks has a daydream (and a nightmare) that his book might be adopted in every region of the country. He is haunted by the voice of the school administrator, and he is a man of flesh and blood, who declared, "We try to make sure that the books we select are not objectionable to anyone." That statement is reported in "The Censors and the Schools," by Jack Nelson and Gene Roberts, Jr. (*Little, Brown*, 1963).

Such a comment is not likely to reenforce a publisher's interest in an author's point of view about a possibly controversial matter, nor will he be excited by a proposal for radical innovation. One is reminded here of a not very popular English song during World War II: "There's a danger to the left and right/And if you dare to show a light/A voice will shout, 'Put the light out!'"

Robert Bierstedt, in a very interesting sociological essay, "The Writers of Textbooks" ("Text Materials in Modern Education," Lee J. Cronbach, ed., *University of Illinois Press*, 1955) points out that "Banned books are rare in our society; banned textbooks, on the contrary, are numerous." Jack Kough is reported in *Publishers' Weekly* (May 13, 1963) as warning his fellow publishers on problems of censorship that: "As an industry, we have adopted an ostrich-like position. In doing so we have elevated a very vulnerable part of our anatomy, and it's available for anyone to take a swat at."

The textbook publisher who seeks and gets state adoptions, who succeeds in establishing markets in many regions of the country has, by his habitually complaisant response to critics, invited them all to play this game of swat. What is this response? It is that of saying to any potential critic, "Please teach me how not to offend you." It is true, of course, that some gallant soul on some occasion writes a public letter saying that it just

is not true that he or his book is un-American, but he is always very lonely and never very loud.

In "Textbooks Are Indispensable!" published by the American Textbook Publishers Institute there is the following assessment of the problem. (No copyright date is indicated, but by internal evidence it appears to be 1955 in my cloth-bound copy.) "They [textbooks] also have to keep up with the latest scholarly research—a job that would keep a dozen energetic graduate students overworked in any one subject field. They must fit their material to a particular grade level, keeping within the limitations of vocabulary and understanding appropriate to the age group. They must try to avoid statements that might prove offensive to any economic, religious, racial or social group, or any civic, fraternal, patriotic or philanthropic society in the whole United States. At the same time they have to find room for numerous illustrations, strive for attractive format, and on top of all this, do their best to be interesting!"

The paragraph following that one goes on to observe that it is surprising that textbooks are able to do their job at all. Sometimes the books succeed almost by subterfuge. Content is practically smuggled into vaguely sentimental fictionalized stories about the way people live in some faraway place or some allegedly more pleasant time. In such a book, it comes as a shock that one is looking at a "social studies text" presumably designed to give a seventh-grade child an understanding of "contemporary cultures other than our own." Such books are only intellectually offensive, and so far as the textbook people are concerned, there is as yet no significantly dangerous pressure group carrying the intellectual's banner. Complaints from that social sector as yet cause no great pain.

Yet, even allowing for the soreness of the textbook publisher's great posterior nerve, even allowing for the essentially non-ideational, non-esthetic and culturally neutral guidelines that the editors of textbooks follow, it is difficult to accept as educationally sound and honorable such attitudes and practices as the following:

The textbook editor who says that it is a small price to pay if a book's adoption hinges upon changing the "Civil War" to "The War Between the States."

It is hard (for whatever earnest pedagogical reason) to tolerate the re-writing of Shakespeare thus: "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, creep on, day by day, to the end of time," or this: "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, listen to me."

It is almost incredible that evolution has still to be bootlegged into some science texts as organic development or that a science textbook is distributed in the Northeast with illustrations of mixed classes in a laboratory, while in the Southeast, the same book is illustrated with a different picture showing white students only.

In a study of current high school textbooks in English,\* Bertrand Evans and James J. Lynch found that in a collection of 72 high school anthologies, almost a third of the books did not use the word *literature* or even a synonym in their title and of the remaining two thirds, many used a reverse, social studies emphasis; thus, instead of a title like "Literature in England" there would be used something like "England in Literature." Sixteen of the anthologies do not deal with the novel in any form. Often there is a sizable representation of radio and television scripts offered under the heading of Drama. There is bowdlerization, rough-shod editing of the classics and even wholesale expurgation, as in the case of a school edition of Pearl Buck's "The Good Earth." (I have heard one satisfied teacher say of this edition, "They got all the sex and dirt out of it.")

On the other hand, as if to compensate for such emendations and deletions, there is the ubiquitous footnote. Sometimes easy and obvious words are glossed (not always accurately). What this practice does to the interest of a student in learning the effective use of the dictionary can readily be imagined.

As a result of their study, Evans and Lynch make some understandably testy comments: "Some books [they are here talking of grammars] start off as if they were to be adolescent novels, by adolescents, for adolescents, about adolescents, and manage to keep a kind of fictional tone even among the nouns, pronouns, and prepositional phrases. . . . We do not believe that a course [in English Composition] has a legitimate excuse for existing that in effect advises the students that they are themselves to be the subject matter of the course. . . . Possibly the English textbooks are the only volumes in the school curriculum that make a determined four-year long effort to keep the adolescent mind feasting upon itself."

The authors are wrong in that last supposition, of course, but it is hard to fault the publishers and editors alone for this condition. There are

\* Bertrand Evans and James J. Lynch, "High School Textbooks in English—A Summary of a Report," in *The 26th Yearbook of the Claremont Reading Conference*, edited by Malcolm P. Douglas (Claremont, Calif.: Claremont Graduate School Curriculum Library, 1962).

educators behind the plot. And they, too, like the people in the textbook business, are not really guilty of malice aforethought. They are just trying to do what they conceive of as their job as well as they know how. These people look upon any book, any educational activity, any collection of materials as an opportunity to help the teacher help the child "to adjust to the realities of life in this world as they are." If the content of a subject has to be watered down or modified to meet this objective, so be it. They seek to create what Dr. Hilda Taba calls "the fail-safe" curriculum. Keep the language simple, they urge. Limit the number of concepts the student must confront on any page. Do not allow any threatening material to appear either in word or picture. They know what is appropriate, for they are the true professionals, they say.

It is tempting here to cast the textbook publisher in the role of Liza on the snowy river bank. He wants to do the right thing. He wants to do it in a free atmosphere. He wants the independence without which no soul can aspire to selfhood, but he also wants to be safe and to be loved. What does he confront? The snarling dogs of the special interest groups, so well cataloged by the American Textbook Publishers Institute; the inexorable ice floes of educational change, and finally, the Simon Legree of the textbook selection committee.

Each of these characters has a chimerical quality; they are not entirely what they seem. Most of them, too, want to serve and to be loved. But Mr. Legree deserves special attention, for, after the bets are laid, after the presses have deposited their burden on the warehouse floor, after the bush-whacking salesmen have sighted the market, the scene is shifted. Things are different. The book must be laid before a selection committee whose members are often dragooned teachers with other interests, serving after hours without additional pay. This committee has to decide among a large number of competing texts in a variety of subjects, which ones shall be bought (adopted) by the school, or the system, or (*pace!*) the state.

What are the criteria for this selection? They may consist of some arcane formula made up of readability scales, interest levels, and the degree of articulation the particular book will have with the rest of the curriculum. There may be no formal criteria, merely a kind of Quaker sense of the meeting. A respected, or feared member of the group says, "I can't explain, but I just would [or would not] feel comfortable with that book in our classrooms."

Textbooks are accepted or turned down because they are profusely illustrated, because they have lavishly colored covers, because they are larger or smaller than the ones in use, because they are written by people with the right kinds of names, coming from the right schools in the right part of the country. Sometimes books are accepted, or rejected, because it is very late on a dreary Friday afternoon.

Of course, textbook selection is not always so capricious. Usually it functions through an efficient bureaucracy. The standards employed may not be educationally relevant. A book can be rejected if the "wrong kind" of materials are used in its manufacture, but the standards will be clearly enunciated. There is gold in being placed on the basal or co-basal lists (which will give a publisher a monopoly or semi-monopoly in the school, system or state). There can be financial failure, on the other hand, if the book's title should appear on the blacklist of one of the societies in the American Textbook Publishers Institute catalog of anguish.

Yet this must be repeated: the editor and publisher of American textbooks is a trapped idealist. He knows the role he can and must play in public education. He strives, somehow, to exploit the best of contemporary thought and technology. He wants to do as good a job as his collective talents and resources will allow. At his best, he has a deep sense of commitment to his responsibilities. He is often directly and personally involved in attempts to raise and maintain high educational standards. He recognizes that he is involved in a field in which the competing and contending forces can, theoretically, be made to be self-canceling. He wants to assist in the development of educational leadership. He is often indefatigable in all of these efforts.

If his results in these multiple endeavors are assessed in modest terms, it can be said that he has done well, even very well. The critics cited here, as well as those who address the public from soap boxes, pulpits and submarines, cannot detract from the reality that the public school classrooms of the land must be furnished with materials that are appropriate, or roughly so, to the requirements of the curriculum. In this country we assign that task to the commercial textbook publisher.

Although that curriculum is not immutable, it is the only arena within which the publisher must perform. The quality of his performance may enlarge or modify the curriculum. Yet it is the rare publisher who will attempt to initiate a radical educational change. Because of this understandable reluctance, the terms "research and development" have spe-

cial meanings in educational publishing. This activity can more accurately be described as market analysis, and therein lies a circular dilemma.

In his essay, cited above, Robert Bierstedt quotes a remark made almost forty years ago by Donald R. Taft: "Textbook writers will write the book that publishers will accept; publishers will accept the books that school boards will adopt; school boards will adopt the books that organized public opinion will demand."

This is even more true today.

"But," says Bierstedt (and this is a most important "but"), "public opinion itself is determined in part by the contents of the texts used in the public schools." So, within this dilemma we come full circle to the author. Although he is a plural creature in most instances, a committee, in fact, that sometimes does not even meet as a committee, the author of a text is, in a very modest way, an innovator of sorts. The quality of his innovations ultimately will affect the quality of public opinion. It is neither naïve nor sentimental to suggest that even slight improvements in the quality of a textbook can eventually effect a significant change in the quality of public opinion. While it is true enough that under the present dispensation, the textbook author cannot be a social critic (although the late Harold Rugg tried to be one and succeeded for a time until the "patriots" found him out), although the textbook author never dares to be a social satirist, he can do some things differently and better than they have been done. And in so doing, his books may even not lose money.

For example, the author(s) of a social studies textbook might write history as Carl Lotus Becker did it back in 1915 in his still beautiful and effective "Beginnings of the American People" (*Houghton Mifflin*). The author(s) of an English grammar text might (as some few have recently tried to) write about the mother tongue with some of the excitement and wonder and love that have been accorded our language by a hundred gleaming talents. It is just possible that geographers could be persuaded once again to direct their energies in part to the teaching of the young, as mathematicians and biologists have already done. (Certainly the work of the Physical Science Study Committee under the guiding genius of Professor Jerrold R. Zacharias showed what could be done with time, talent, and money in the production of the brilliant and financially successful high school "Physics" published by D. C. Heath & Co.)

It is true, of course, that mathematics and the physical sciences have a

benign neutrality or at least a separateness from the pressures of social conformity. There can be no assault from a sectional bias upon a paraphrase of the Second Law of Thermodynamics (although some school boards in the Plains States will fault a geology text that refers to their region as "flat." The accepted designation is "level.")

What is generally lacking in the English textbooks and the social studies, as well as in those proto-disciplines such as home economics and "distributive education" (I did not invent this one. It *is* a course in many of our high schools) is a sense of fond and tolerant humor concerning the human condition and of the possibility that life, though it is often grim, is, by definition, inevitably tolerable.

There are great challenges and expanding opportunities facing the American textbook publisher today. If the critic will put aside the notion that these books might or ought to be great literature, on the order, say, of William James' great work, "Principles of Psychology," and settle for a more modest product, one can see the beginnings of significant gains.

Some proponents of programmed instruction claim that in the future the good textbook will, in effect, be a good program. This is nonsense except insofar as good programming techniques can serve as a check on the quality of organization and exposition of a text. For it should be clear that a textbook is more than and different from a program. It *is* a course of study. It is a collection of materials. It is a base upon which classroom procedures can be established and maintained. It does give support to the beginning teacher, especially. But herein lies a persistent danger. Too often, both authors and editors of textbooks treat the teacher-in-the-abstract as a rather unbright person. Teachers' manuals can be insultingly patronizing. "Suggested activities," with which so many books are overloaded, can stultify professional creativity in any teacher. Students can be tranquilized with "busy work." It is to be hoped that the newer textbooks will be at once more modest in their aims, more respectful of the teacher (and the student) and less blatant in their use of the page-filling and pointless illustration.

With the current concern for the "disadvantaged child," it should be possible for the educational publisher to reconsider the long-neglected life of minorities in the cities. As Dr. Otto Klineberg reported in "Life Is Fun in a Smiling, Fair-Skinned World" (*Saturday Review*, Feb. 16, 1963), in far too many classroom "readers" which purport to introduce the young child both to the joys of reading and to the realities of the modern world,

"The American people are almost exclusively white or Caucasian." They are almost always Christian, almost always residents of antiseptic and bland suburban communities. Wherever minorities are introduced, their members are usually shown as quaint or as the source of tolerant humor.

We are an urban civilization and are becoming increasingly city-centered. Yet we act, not only in our textbooks but also in our state and national legislatures, as if the 19th century rural myth were a modern reality. There is a desperate need for books that display and celebrate our diversity, our pluralism, and the fact that life is not always a sun-drenched Sunday afternoon. As Klineberg notes of his examination of fifteen of these readers published by several of the leading publishing houses: ". . . life in the United States as it is portrayed in these children's readers is in a general way easy and comfortable, frustrations are rare and usually overcome quite easily, people (all white, mostly blond, and 'North European' in origin) are almost invariably kind and generous. There are other kinds of people in the world but they live in far-off countries or in days gone by: they evidently have no place in the American scene."

It should be pointed out, however, that this tendency to distort or to misrepresent the world as it is and has been is not unique to textbook publishers in the United States. UNESCO studies have reported on the ways in which the Scandinavian countries' school books display the history of the bordering nations. In a little report called "Better Textbooks" a UNESCO committee notes that: ". . . sweeping generalizations about whole nations implant in young minds such ideas as the following: 'Americans are rich and uncultured,' and 'Europeans are war-loving.' Also, many textbooks include texts and illustrations which are quite unsuited to the age and interests of the children who use them. Finally, some 'world' histories neglect other continents and civilizations than their own."

UNESCO has sought with some success to persuade its member countries to work together to provide information and guidance so that matters of common social, historical and cultural interest are reported fairly in the textbooks of the several nations. Educators from the United States have been associated with these efforts from the beginnings, as have representatives from the leading textbook houses.

In this country, some publishers work hard to adjust the imbalance that Klineberg reports. Others, the majority, are still waiting for the sales reports of their competitors. Will there be schoolmen who will accept



books that may not be universally loved? Will it be possible to make a profit out of a modest textbook sale in only one part of this country? Will it be respectable pedagogically to deal honestly with minority groups? Many publishers and editors and educators have said yes to these questions for many years. Not very many have followed this affirmation with any significant action.

The textbook publisher in the United States today is engaged in producing a wide range of educational materials: films, film-strips and slides, recordings and tapes, tests and teaching machines. Some of these are packaged with specific textbooks. Many are being offered independently. Textbook publishers are increasingly confronted with competition from the government and the great foundations as well as from other sectors of the industrial and business communities. This competition ranges from the production of basic materials to complete courses. The PSSC physics textbook is such a product. Some publishers view this trend with alarm. When Government (always referred to with the evasive capital G) or the great (and thus anonymous) foundations assemble an army of scholars who produce entire courses and then offer the finished product to the hands of commerce, often under competitive bidding, then, some observers fear, editorial integrity of the publisher is put in jeopardy.

Herein, these people warn, lies the danger of a national curriculum. That way lies the loss of local autonomy of the school boards. This is common enough in the Soviet Union and in France. It is anathema in the United States. Frank Redding reports in his previously cited article in *Publishers' Weekly* (March 18, 1963) that some of this danger is already upon us: "Now something new has been added. Many thousands of teachers are being trained in the conduct of *one* kind of course, *one* point of view, *one* methodology, *one* set of materials. Over a period of years, then, we may conceivably expect to see *one course* in a given discipline. (Did someone say 'brainwashing'? The word has been used in precisely this context.)"

Of course, no textbook publisher has ever achieved such a goal. Some may have secretly dreamed of it. (Imagine, universal acceptance of *our* text!) Some have come very close.

There are and there have been basal reading series that have had very wide acceptance. Some of them have been almost universally imitated. These series have been promoted with the help of training teams from the publishing house that were literally mobile teacher training corps. They

have offered a single course, a single method, a single point of view. They have done their work effectively and well.

These series have sold books, but they have also, whatever complaints we may rightly lodge against them, provided a welcomed professional program to many needy schools and systems that then provided a better education than had previously been possible. That these big publishers sometimes succeeded in driving out equally good or even superior methods and materials is often forgotten. That they sometimes stalled professional educational growth in a dull, safe area is sometimes overlooked. They were known. They satisfied. They sold.

Frank Redding concluded his thoughtful and provocative article with the observation that there will be books in the schools of the future, but the question of what they will be like and how much they will resemble what we have known, "is a matter for the schools to decide." He has warrant to be more sanguine. There will be *textbooks* in the schools of the future. Some of them undoubtedly will be poorer than the worst that we have condemned. Most of them will be better than we can now imagine. They will have to be, not merely in response to competition within the industry and with other kinds of educational materials, but because their roles will become more precisely specified. What the textbook does brilliantly, at its best, is to define and display a course of study—not *the* course, but one among several or many, ready to meet specific needs or preferences of teachers or school systems. What it need not do, because it can do it only indifferently well, is to carry all the baggage of collateral and related materials. This can best be left to the rest of the publishing industry and to other producers of pedagogical paraphernalia.

The paperbound book is only at the beginning of its career on the educational scene. It will find its place at every level, literally from kindergarten to the graduate school. It can and must become less expensive than it now is. It must become absolutely expendable. (What a plus this can be in teaching people to own as well as to use their books!) A collection of paperbacks can provide the desideratum of every teacher, the genuine classroom library, designed by a real teacher for *his* own class, the one that is with him *this* year. It would be a little library, adaptable to the changing needs of that class and by its variety it would be a sure shield against the neo-Comstockians who see evil even in dictionaries.

Educational television, in spite of its stuttering and high-altitude false starts, will become increasingly effective in classroom instruction, but it

will be mediated by the presence and the control of the appropriate textbook.

The textbook may rarely be, as it is not now, the work of a leading scholar in a field, although scholars have returned in increasing numbers to their former interest in the creation of science textbooks and are beginning to look with favor at the challenges of the humanities. The textbook will probably never be written in a prose style that will satisfy even an incompetent teacher of freshman English, but it can, under the guidance of the existing editorial talent now available to any textbook publisher, be a far more respectable product than it all too often is.

Finally, the textbook must learn to pay appropriate homage to the humanities, with or without the help of leading scholars. Social studies, that shoddy confederation of proto-disciplines, must be forced to release history from bondage and return geography to its ancient virtue. For even as the American school shifts its functions, as it always must in a democracy that demands social change, the textbook must serve as a respected carrier of the new as well as of the traditional. It cannot and must not attempt to be a summa of all existing knowledge. What is called for is an alliance among textbook, teacher and the glass through which the student, of whatever age, can view things as they are and assess with courageous excitement the way things might someday be better than they have ever been.

REUBEN A. BROWER

## *Book Reading and the Reading of Books*

*Most men have learned to read to serve a paltry convenience, as they have learned to cipher in order to keep accounts and not be cheated in trade; but of reading as a noble intellectual exercise they know little or nothing; yet this only is reading, in a high sense, not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep the while, but what we have to stand on tiptoe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to.*

—THOREAU, *Walden*

PERHAPS I SHOULD begin by explaining the seeming tautology of the title. The unlovely compound, "book reading," comes from the literature (as it is politely called) of the teaching of reading. It is much used by educators who inquire into the process of reading and the methods of teaching it, and by sociologists who study our "reading culture." "Book reading" has a suitably scientific flavor, since the educators are concerned with defining and controlling "reading skills," the sociologists with making quantitative descriptions of the behavior of the reading public. "The reading of books," as I intend it, refers to the reading of literature, "not to serve a paltry convenience" but to exercise "the nobler faculties" in "our most alert and wakeful hours."

"The reading of books" for the teacher-critic is and will remain an art, at least in any foreseeable future. But in invoking the term art, if not with a capital A, I may be misunderstood by both scientific and literary readers.

The scientist may suppose that I am opposed to extending the area in which reading is directed by technique; the literary man may think that I am overinclined to trust the subconscious, or "inspiration," as it was once called. But to react in either of these ways is to fall with Sir Charles Snow into an easy opposition of the two cultures, to assume that the pursuit of science at a high level and the pursuit of literature by the alert writer or reader are necessarily antithetical. For the present purpose the two cultures might be defined as the cultures of those who are the victims of technique and of those who are fully in command of it. The man of art is distinguished from the amateur by his professional concern with technique, by his fine intuitive judgment of the areas where his operations are voluntary and where involuntary, though in a mysterious sense "directed." The man of science, in contrast with the mere technician, knows with even greater clarity than the artist where control ends and where imagination necessarily enters if he is to "make" science and not merely "do" it. There is no necessary war between art and science: the Greek who discovered the *techné* of applying a black glaze to a clay pot did not know that he was both artist and scientist. Daedalus, as the title of this journal nicely implies, was the Leonardo of ancient aviation.

I offer these home truths in order to anticipate an emphasis in the pages to follow. The science and the pseudoscience of experts in book reading can determine for many young readers in our schools the level of their response to "high" literature, simply because their teachers have been taught by the experts. If we want to raise this level and make certain that alert and sensitive readers are helped rather than damaged by their early training, we must make sure that the science of teaching reading is better science—which means, paradoxically, that it is also art. Hence this rash Icarian venture by a teacher of literature into the world of Education. "Why read that stuff?" a literary colleague has charitably asked. The answer is simple: curiosity and bad conscience. For some years I have been interested in how college and university students can become better readers of "high" literature. My interest, like that of many teacher-critics of the past thirty years, started from I. A. Richards' disclosure in "Practical Criticism" of how literate readers did in fact read, and from F. R. Leavis' account in "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture" of what was happening to the small public that sets standards for the discriminating reading of literature. Further discoveries, through teaching, of how students misread led to experiments in close reading of a kind now familiar in many

colleges and universities. I suspect, however, that college teachers who have participated in the recent revolution in criticism have spent little time considering how the teachers are trained who teach children to read, how the teacher and the pupils who learn from him are made or unmade as readers of literature.

The appearance of two reports,<sup>1</sup> "Learning to Read," by James Bryant Conant's committee, and Mary Austin's study, "The Torch Lighters, Tomorrow's Teachers of Reading," led me to sample the immense literature<sup>2</sup> on the teaching of reading. This essay is an attempt to express some concerns and hopes of a teacher of literature suffering from a first exposure to the teaching of book reading.

But what does the teaching of reading have to do with maintaining a public for high literature—for Shakespeare and modern poetry, for fiction as represented by George Eliot and Conrad or Joyce, or history as represented by Gibbon, Parkman or Henry Adams? Possibly a great deal, especially in America, where this public is peculiarly dependent on college and school for knowing what to read and how to interpret it, and where for a good many years youngsters have been exposed to highly controlled if changing methods of learning to read. The dean of teachers of reading in this country, the late William S. Gray,<sup>3</sup> found that abroad there is much less study of "reading problems above the primary grades," and much less technical guidance of teachers. Numerous reports in recent years make it clear that Americans have been affected by inadequate teaching of reading if not by good. Though geniuses may slip through any system with little damage, teachable students of good intelligence who form the body of competent readers of literature may be considerably affected by the teaching they enjoy or suffer in school. It is with these potentially active readers, who help set standards for writers and critics, that I am concerned.

As an example of how methods catch on in this country, consider Evelyn Wood's much publicized Institute of Dynamic Reading. *Time*<sup>4</sup> reports that readers trained in her system race through informative prose at fifteen to twenty thousand words a minute and "mop up 'Zhivago' in an hour." Readers allow "the eyes to trigger the mind directly . . . eliminating the necessity of saying, hearing or thinking the sound of words." "You don't see the words as words. . . . The story rolls into you. You get the total impact." This means, of course, the death of literature, and is interesting only as a symptom of how the desire for rapid reading can become a disease. The apparent aim is to eliminate literature by reducing

it to cinema, where indeed, "The story rolls into you," with a minimum of activity.

One might dismiss this and similar programs as the foolish fringe of the remedial reading movement, if there were not reasons for being apprehensive, such as: the American passion for quick and easy solutions, the importance attached by parents and teachers to high scores in tests necessary for admission to college, the semi-official approval given by President Kennedy and others who have taken courses in speed-reading. Experts know that speed must be kept in its place, though criticisms within the academy indicate that some teachers have been beguiled, as one writer says, by "the demon" of speed. Arthur Heilman<sup>5</sup> of the University of Oklahoma notes that the technique of fast reading is justified for the "limited purposes for which it was designed," that good readers adjust their rate to the material and to their purpose in studying it. But he also reports that publicity for the Columbia University Study Program in Rapid Reading includes the statement that "rapid readers are retentive readers," which suggests a causal factor that is hardly justifiable. How common the notion is in educational circles that speed is of the first importance appears from a casual comment in a recent report<sup>6</sup> on research in reading: "the two goals we strive for in reading: speed, and what the reading experts call 'power' but most of us call 'comprehension.'" Speed first; comprehension later.

The experts are also keenly aware of how difficult it is to show lasting improvement in speed or comprehension as a result of using any one method or device. Both the Conant and the Austin reports stress the need for good teachers, whatever the methods used, and the second report comments on the wide gap between theories taught in colleges of education and daily practice in the classroom. Whether the lag is altogether an evil may be judged from some of the reflections that follow.

What are the impressions of a teacher-critic who moves from the world of literary criticism and close reading into the world of research on methods of reading? He is struck first by much academic prose of the kind Robert Frost characterizes so well: "It's *declare, declare, declare*." We may forgive the flatness in the interest of objectivity, but not the Germanic compounds of which "book reading" is a mild example. We hear too often: "language skills," "reading skills," "recognition skills," "content fields," and "content analysis"; and too many plurals such as "language immaturities," "these learnings" and "these recognitions." A

climactic sentence in one report ends with: "the desired pupil learning outcomes." Though these offenses seem to appear less often in the more recent yearbooks of reading conferences, the decorum of the older objective style sometimes gives way to talk of classroom "miracles," of "enthusiastic" teachers, and "exciting" programs.

Yet why be disturbed by the style of academic publications, which is bad enough, even in literary fields? Because to read and write English is to hear it, and if standards are not set by the teachers of teachers, what can we expect of the pupils? No area in the teaching of reading is of more interest to the literary critic than that of oral reading, or more generally, of oral (and aural) experience. For the critic, literature is first of all an event of speech, articulated and heard. The new cinematic verbal art, if it exists, is not the speaking art of Western literature as we have previously known it. For the creation and enjoyment of this art, hearing of words as a physical event and dramatic gesture is essential. The debate over phonics (teaching the sounds of letters), with which the teaching of oral reading traditionally begins, is therefore of more than academic interest. There has been a continuing dispute for some years as to whether sight words (learning whole words by seeing them as visual patterns) should be taught before phonics, and whether much or little attention should be given to learning to read words by analysis of the sounds represented by letters and groups of letters. According to the Conant report, the great debate seems to have been resolved in a compromise combining both methods, though with some sight words being introduced at first. A minority report suggests, however, that the proper combination is still far from being settled.

The argument has a further interest if we want Johnny to read literature as well as books, because it is connected with the dispute over silent versus oral reading. Lip-readers and vocalizers (those who sound words internally as they read) are usually slower readers, and not only slower, but also inferior in comprehension. The classic experiment<sup>7</sup> in teaching only silent reading in the first and second grades seems like some other classic experiments to have been of negative value: the differences in the sixth grade between those who were taught oral reading and those who were taught silent reading are now regarded as not significant.<sup>8</sup> But the original report favored the delaying of oral reading "until the basic habit of silent reading, namely, associating printed symbols directly with meaning, has been established."<sup>9</sup> More interesting than the experiment itself is the unqualified



endorsement of rapid reading ("the desirability of discovering a method of 'flying' in reading") with no positive recognition of the value of slower and oral reading. "Most of the functional purposes of oral reading, *except those of showing off are not needed*"<sup>10</sup> until after the primary grades (my italics).

Such extreme scorn for oral reading was probably not typical in 1945, and is certainly not typical of research papers and textbooks of the last eight or ten years. But there is still a fairly common tendency to undervalue oral experience of language in reading, and too rarely very much emphasis on its importance for full literary comprehension. The parent who says to his child, "Don't take that tone to me!" has a better measure of comprehension than the expert who attends only to "meaning." One of the better texts that recognizes many "values of oral reading" begins a series of "General Observations" on the subject with: "Learning to read silently takes priority over learning to read orally. In our society it is desirable that everyone be able to read for meaning."<sup>11</sup> The author of this remark, like others who favor some oral reading, tends to regard it as primarily useful in "audience situations." What we miss is a positive recognition of the part that the heard, *aural* experience plays in our response to language and to literature even in silent reading. To catch the implication of a single word in a newspaper editorial or a novel often depends on our hearing "that kind" of person talking in "that kind" of voice. Reading aloud before we have heard in the inner ear the sentence and voice of the speaker may indeed be damaging to comprehension in the full and in the limited sense. But we also often read aloud as a way of discovering what we should hear as we read silently. The importance of hearing the sentence in the inner ear both for interpretation and judgment of writing seems to be neglected by reading experts. Little wonder that many students in our colleges and graduate schools are incapable of hearing their own sentences and recognizing their un-English and non-human character. Part of the job of evaluating a report on methods of silent reading is to detect the cheap up-to-dateness of tone in a phrase like "a method of 'flying' in reading."

The Conant and the Austin reports are again informative in the attitudes implied toward oral reading. In contrast with the full discussion of phonics, the Conant report does not mention oral reading of any sort, even as a tool of recognizing words. The Austin report finds "a distinct division of opinion over the stress on oral versus silent reading in the beginner's

program.”<sup>12</sup> Most of the experts consulted would give little emphasis to oral reading after the first grade, though one instructor (who wrote with concern for “our embattled mother tongue”) urged more “meaningful oral reading . . . in middle and upper grades.”<sup>13</sup> The report is silent on the value of oral experience for the interpretation of literature.

A happy contrast is offered by the volume “Oral Aspects of Reading.” A number of teachers who themselves write with distinct voices testify to the value of “expressive reading” as a way of extending and refining literary experience. One writer describes a course in “listening,” a skill that seems as useful as silent reading for preparing children in the age of radio-television “to meet the demands of modern life.” In another paper we find clear recognition of the dramatic character of literature, of the need for the student to re-enact the drama implied by the words in order to enter into the “real life” of what he is reading. Although these enthusiastic teachers put too much emphasis on reading aloud as a theatrical art, they are interested in opening up full literary experience for their students, and they seem to know what it means.

We also see signs of what we miss in the pronouncements on “appreciation” on the part of apparently older and more distinguished authorities. Some attempts are made to show teachers and students how they may observe uses of language in discovering dramatic and other kinds of implied meaning. In a field where methods of “word analysis” flourish, there is strangely little talk of *literary* analysis. More surprising is the apparent gap between current teaching and criticism of literature in colleges of liberal arts and the teaching of reading in schools of education. This remains so in spite of Richards’ example in writing and in teaching, in spite of the influence in English schools of F. R. Leavis and Denys Thomson, and the success in this country of the textbooks by Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks. (Let me interject here that no one should be encouraged to talk “methods” to school children. Better no method than the tortures of literary Gradgrinds.)

The clearest sign of the distance between teachers of reading and college teachers of literature lies in the vocabulary casually used by the former when talking of the more literary kinds of reading. In textbooks and pedagogical articles, “appreciation,” “enjoyment,” and “taste” abound—if “abound” is the word for these often joyless discussions. The difference is not so much in the terms (which are often indispensable) but in the lack of reserve with which they are used and in the failure to make them

meaningful and useful to the prospective teacher. "Appreciation," frequently linked with a perfunctory "aesthetic," is used with no hint that a reaction against the tradition of Pater took place some forty years ago. "Taste" is introduced with more uneasiness and some sense of how difficult it is to define for a public with no centers or standards to which choices can be referred. One elaborate attempt to take into account the results of "current research" must leave the inquiring teacher more confused than if he had been given no definition whatever:<sup>14</sup>

In general, a higher level of taste will be achieved when the background of experience is broad enough to cultivate discrimination which leads to choice of those reading materials which provide more adequately for basic and acquired needs, for personal and social development, and for the greater satisfactions that come with these.

The same writer disposes of "the so-called classics" in three sentences, while devoting nearly four pages to the comics. In a later rehearsal of the same discussion, the usefulness of book clubs in cultivating "a higher level" is referred to, but without reservation or any suggestion that taste may not be served by letting others exercise it for us. How is the child to become, as one authority callously puts it, "a discriminating consumer"?

The greatest contrast between the two worlds of teaching lies in the use of the term "critical reading." For the reading experts this usually means judgment of factual accuracy and soundness in argument, the detection of propaganda techniques and concealed distortions—admittedly important kinds of judgment for youngsters to practice. "Critical reading" in college and university is concerned primarily with imaginative literature, with discovering its design and meaning through close study of language and with reaching an evaluation of the total experience of a work. In the experts' discussion of critical reading or appreciation of literature there is in general much vagueness as to how the teacher and pupil are to take some first steps toward reaching a more precise and a richer response to a writer's words.

And yet the young will usually recognize the difference between the less good and the better if they can first see what is "there." But we must show them how they can reach the point where they can make a choice, not by our enthusiasm alone nor by displaying our superior taste, but by leading them through the words, their grammatical and rhetorical uses and relationships. A child may not have "wandered lonely as a cloud,"

but he has wandered and been lonely and seen a cloud, and we can show him that by using these elementary recognitions and by mastering the syntax of Wordsworth's line he may reach the "syntax" of sensations which is beauty. The school teacher of reading is in a better position to do this than the college teacher of literature, who must first induce the too-knowing freshman to become a child again (that is, a sensitive grammarian) and to unlearn what he has often mistakenly learned as "literary appreciation." It has been said that anyone can draw who can distinguish between an eighth and a sixteenth of an inch. It might also be said that sound literary discriminations can be made by a school boy who can tell the difference between his mother's tone of voice and that of his doting grandmother, or who can detect the edge of irony in a friend's jokes or his teacher's advice. Discrimination by ear in this listening generation is developed to a remarkably high degree; the pity is that we do not take advantage of this skill early enough, at the very time we are teaching the young to analyze "content" and measure accuracy of fact. We separate the two modes of discrimination to the loss of both art and science.

In the 1959 volume of the International Reading Association, there are three or four papers that are aimed in the right direction (again apparently by younger men). One writer<sup>15</sup> gives a first-rate demonstration of how to teach a piece of literary prose, which is not the easiest thing to do. His concluding advice, "Teach for experience, not appreciation," shows a significant change in vocabulary and a realization of how a teacher may best work toward the correction of taste. Another writer<sup>16</sup> gives an excellent diagnosis of the failure of the enthusiasts to do much *teaching* of literature. He also notes the stress on "skills of word attack and the like" while the "wholeness" of the reading process is forgotten. He finds two main reasons for these deficiencies: "(1) The body of principles which has been built up by the Child Study Movement, (2) Extensive use of, and reliance upon, the normative survey technique in pseudoscientific educational research." Hence, he adds, the limitation of "children's literature" to "anything the child *can* read and is *interested* in reading." Hence too, the fear of requiring pupils to memorize poetry or literature of any sort. Sentimental concern for "child development" may cut the child off from reliving poetry by getting the words off the page and into the self.

The neglect of memory, seemingly minor in itself, is another sign of the loss of belief in the value of literature and the decline in resourceful ways

of teaching it. But like other techniques of learning, memorization may be practiced stupidly or intelligently. Rightly directed, it is one way of knowing and loving literature, one way of living into the language of poetry. In the entire Austin report on courses for teachers of reading there is only one mention of the subject, and that among topics which "received even less" than "moderate stress," where it is discreetly referred to as "recall skills." So much for Memory, mother of the Muses!

The lack of interest in literature displayed by many of the experts points to severely limited aims for education in reading and for all education. Titles and recurrent phrases reveal the more serious purposes: "reading in a changing society," or "for effective living," or "for keeping abreast of the times," or to "cope with the challenges of the coming decade," or for "child development," or to meet children's "interests" and "needs," or for "maturity." Again, the terms are less disturbing—though their cliché quality is almost unbearable—than the silences and gestures that accompany their use. Those who talk of adjusting to the "times" and a "changing society" betray little awareness that societies have always been changing, that the times may be out of joint, that our present society may be progressing toward nightmare. A survey of the qualities of "mature readers" includes fashionable names for nearly every intellectual and emotive value in the catalogue, with little stress on the value of knowing one's self and of cherishing the inner life. What has been known historically as the life and care of the soul has all but vanished. We find instead that "Strang pointed out a decade ago that most readers have a central core or radix." We may fondly hope that these stony words conceal the bread of life; but no—the inner is just more outer: "The striking fact about the central core of the readers interviewed in this study is that it was focused, as a rule, on human welfare and social progress."<sup>17</sup> In this way research sets the "normative" aims for maturity. Again there is not a flicker of doubt, no hint that "a broad social outlook," splendid as it may be, is not "core" enough. As often in this literature, "personal development" is recommended in writing devoid of personal accent, with no asides or gestures to assure the reader that the writer knows what "personal" means. Gestures of another kind are more telling. We read, for example, in a discussion of adjusting materials to interests of the child: "Children's almost universal liking for literature which stimulates the *imagination* is not an unhealthy trend, providing contact with reality is

not lost.”<sup>18</sup> (Consider the definitions of imagination and reality.) Or we learn among the “uses of reading” that “for many people, reading is a highly favored form of recreation.”<sup>19</sup>

The ambiguous attitude toward teaching “appreciation” combines satisfaction concerning progress in this area with fear that it may go too far. Thus the Conant report finds it “one of the areas best served at present in the intermediate grades,” but asks “whether the development of appreciation is actually not given precedence over teaching skills needed in study and in critical reading.”<sup>20</sup> The ambiguity is traceable to the limited notion of “appreciation” and to the vague if enthusiastic teaching it often encourages. If “appreciation” is separated from critical alertness and disciplined response to language, the fear is justified. The distrust points again to the lack of assured belief in the value of imaginative literature. A similar ambiguity appears in the Austin report, in connection with the teaching of children’s literature:<sup>21</sup>

. . . the prevailing winds in this region of collegiate instruction are warm and comforting. More and more teacher training programs are willing to allocate curriculum time to specialized instruction in children’s literature. . . . However, this trend gives rise to an important question: shall the program in children’s literature overshadow the fundamental course in reading instruction?

(Note the portentous “shall.”)

The trouble here, of course, is with *children’s* literature. One may well be concerned with an overemphasis on teaching literature written for children and an underemphasis on teaching literature written for adults. The aims of “intelligent participation in a democratic society” and of “coping with the challenge of the coming decade” might be better realized by introducing adult literature earlier in our schools. For those who believe that Russia is the challenge, it is disquieting to hear a speaker at the 1962 meeting of the International Reading Association declare, “If Russian third-graders are reading Tolstoy, Gorki and Chekhov, I’m sorry for them and for the authors.” The newspaper report adds that the speaker, “a noted writer for children,” believes that “children, both Russian and American, should be allowed to enjoy books written for their own age rather than pressed to tackle adult authors.”<sup>22</sup> It is also disquieting to read in a teachers’ textbook of the miracle of a boy reading fluently *after six years in school* the World Book Encyclopedia, Compton’s Pictured

Encyclopedia, Our Wonderful World, and the *Junior Natural History Magazine*, *My Weekly Reader*, "and even some adult newspapers."<sup>23</sup>

In general, there is a lack of a larger, more complex historical and moral vision in these writers, even those who are dissatisfied with present-day teacher training. There is, in this respect, a marked contrast between the experts, whether educators or sociologists, and the critics and university teachers of literature in this country and especially in England. Though we cannot ask an expert on book reading to be also a critic of literature and of society, we may look for some community of mind with (to cite some oddly assorted names) Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling, and Dwight Macdonald, or with F. R. Leavis, Raymond Williams, and Richard Hoggart. Of the Americans named it may at least be said that they have some knowledge of historic European culture and its connections with American culture; of the English, that despite differences, they share a concern for the loss of connection between historic culture and the culture of the literate masses. I found in a surprising number of instances that the teachers of reading who show most concern for the teaching of literature and who reveal some scope and complexity of vision (beyond the vaguely "social") come from Canadian schools and universities. As Gray's studies indicate, the teaching of reading in England and France is less method-ridden and places more reliance on the teacher's intuitions. As a Canadian writer puts it, teachers are still regarded as "artists and craftsmen." Though a sociologist may say that the traditional study of literature and the educational ideal it implies are inappropriate to a world of mass education and mass communication, the teacher of literature will feel that he owes his first allegiance to the always relatively small number of students who will be the readers of high literature. They may have as little influence on the mass culture as did Milton on the culture of the Restoration, but it is important that they should exist as witnesses to the possibility of finer orderings of literature and life.

Lack of concern that this audience should remain active and uncorrupted appears even in the better studies by American authorities on book reading. The admirably incisive though depressing analyses of the reading public by Bernard Berelson dispel certain myths about "Who Reads What Books and Why," but the assurance he offers "that there is just as large and hard a core of serious readers today as there ever was"<sup>24</sup> is not very consoling. Berelson seems untroubled by the fact that "At best all we can do is to compare the book reading of a highly selected group

[in the past] with a public five or six times larger today." It is little comfort to be told only that a certain percentage of the public reads "good" books. The question is *how* the "serious" public reads these books, and how the "good books" are selected, and by what critics in particular. Berelson tells us that by "good books" he means "recognized classics and highly regarded contemporary writing." One list he cites (from the American Library Association) includes only a single title that might serve as a test of "high" reading, *if well read*. Though it is true, as Berelson says, that Viewing with Alarm has been the business of critics in many periods, he fails to see that this must indeed be always so, that the best readers must always be on guard against the temptation to read at less than their best level. The sociologist who studies mass reading habits and other forms of mass culture often does not see that the teacher-critic is concerned by the decline in the level of choice and response among the very people who are reading "good books." (Berelson's list is sufficient evidence.) He is alarmed by the level of reading among college graduates and members of the academy, among writers for respectable journals, newspapers, and book club "reviews," and the audiences who depend on their guidance. Here is a problem of research worthy of the ingenuity and energy of experts on mass culture.

In relation to this "alarm," F. R. Leavis' much misunderstood criticism of C. P. Snow has a special significance. The elevation of Sir Charles, especially in America, to a position of sage and master novelist is, as Leavis made clear, a good indication of the level of "appreciation" among members of our so-called higher reading public. The value of Leavis' lecture lay not in the *ad hominem* attack, which infuriated some and fascinated others, but in the literary criticism of the cliché character of Snow's writing and thinking. The warm response to his criticism of culture and to the social drama of his novels is to be expected from book readers who have become deaf to the speaking voice in literature and who are trained primarily in what is called "content analysis." Sir Charles' recent remarks urging that "American elementary education . . . be strengthened and made more rigorous" becomes therefore slightly ironic. The weakness in our school teachers of reading, as we have seen, is directly related to the taste of the public that has created Snow the major novelist and critic of culture.

The reader who has been "snowed" by the academic middlebrow reputation of the Master is already certain that, despite my disclaimer early in



this essay, I am against Science and Social Betterment. But my intent has been to recommend cultivation of a more truly scientific awareness by teachers of reading and their teachers, a more humble acknowledgment of how few tested techniques of reading we possess and of how much is unknown about the process of making meanings with words. I have also been urging that the experts should make more use of the experiments in critical reading undertaken here and in England within the past thirty years. Ways of reading that are teachable and imitable are a part of the public knowledge we call "science." But no methods will be of much value except as they serve larger aims—though the aims will in turn prescribe methods. In the too common restriction of the use of reading to social goods, to producing the well-adjusted child of the modern democratic dream, reading experts are indeed appalling to the literary critic. For literature at its best is almost inevitably subversive, testing and questioning standards imposed by institutions and groups of every kind. The writer's motto is always Wallace Stevens' "I am the personal./Your world is you. I am my world."\*

To end on a note of hope, I should like to call attention to a bolder sort of experiment in the teaching of reading, now being conducted by Omar K. Moore of Yale University.<sup>25</sup> Under his permissive direction—like Frost he knows in teaching not to teach—children two and three years old have been using the electric typewriter to learn to read and write easily and well. Most remarkable, and the condition of their success, is that they have enjoyed the process. The important point about Moore's work is not the discovery of a new gimmick, but the depth and free-ranging character of the thought preceding and accompanying his experiments. Moore began, not with a search for reading skills, but with an interest in "the cognitive capacities of human beings," and more particularly in "the truly remarkable ability of the young to learn their native tongue, just because they want to." His "theoretical position assumes that children enjoy using their minds,"<sup>26</sup> a position derived from wide and thoughtful reading in philosophy (Whitehead, Locke, and others), in psychology, and literature. In describing the aims of social scientists, Moore sees them as "continuing the work begun (for our civilization) by Homer and Hesiod"<sup>27</sup>—a remark of a kind too seldom encountered in the research of reading experts. He does not, in other words, find a conflict between setting up an

\* Wallace Stevens, "Bantams in Pine Woods," in *Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954).

experiment and maintaining communication with thinkers and writers who have set up "folk models" (to use his term) for civilized life in the past. He has a sense of history, and rarer still, a sense of humor. So he speaks unabashedly of the "fun" children have in "autotelic" learning, in learning for its own sake. He writes with a personal accent, which is the surest evidence that he is genuinely interested in "human development." If such humane research can set a model for further experiments in the teaching of reading, perhaps in the not too remote future "book reading" may return to "the reading of books."

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BENJAMIN DEMOTT

## *Statement and Struggle: A Note on Teaching against the Environment*

*The truth is, we must often struggle and always be prepared to struggle . . . to keep alive [the] inherent sense for what is lively and good in art. How to conduct this battle joyously, in such a way that we will . . . not alienate [people] from the life of the mind, is a problem which it may take genius to solve.*

—ISAAC ROSENFELD

WHY A STRUGGLE? Why a battle? Why a tortuous problem requiring Mind? Only among the innocent do the questions still arise. It is known that the dragon Masscult has uncounted tongues, and that whenever one is sheared—whenever a bad book, say, receives a stern just notice in the New York *Times* book review section—two or a dozen nastier fangs flame out instantly in its place. It is also known that the standards once confidently invoked by the dragon's quondam foe, the literary humanist, have lately been sapped of authority by historicism. ("Popular art is normally decried as vulgar by the cultivated people of its time," says Northrop Frye, speaking in the new historicistic tone, "then it loses favor with its original audience as a new generation grows up; then it begins to merge into the softer lighting of 'quaint,' and cultivated people become interested in it; and finally it begins to take on the archaic dignity of the primitive.") It is clear in addition that the simple terms in which matters such as the size of the potential audience for good work were once discussed—terms that link taste and class—are no longer useful or

even relevant. (In the world of entertainment, as Raymond Williams soundly remarks, "the masses" and "the minority" are models constructed and manipulated by powerful entrepreneurs, "models which in part create and reinforce the situation they apparently describe.")

That intellectuals and teachers are generally more conscious now than in yesteryear of the complexities of the problem does not mean, however, that they have a clear understanding of the circumstances governing their own efforts at coping with it. Available critiques of individual popcultural depravities (from *Playboy* to the *National Geographic*) and compilations of economic facts about massification (from the break-even point for first novels to the required capitalization for a new daily paper in New York) are, to be sure, of some help. They establish on the one hand that contention for the lively and good in literary art is not simply contention against profit, Henry Luce, and comma faults, but against certain kinds of experience whose attractions must be grasped in general terms—*readers'* terms. And on the other, they strengthen belief that the likeliest challenger of the dragon is indeed Education in the large—education "against the environment," education functioning as the champion of good literary experience against bad. But such inquiries do not clarify the nature of the forces inhibiting teachers from becoming challengers. If it is true that sooner or later every popculturist finds himself imagining an ideal warfare between the academy and kitsch, it is also true that most of the tribe avoid the question why the outbreak of actual hostilities has been so long postponed. And until that question is answered, the likelihood is small that challengers will emerge.

Part of the answer, naturally, is far from recondite: the inhibiting agents in academe include the tide of relativism just mentioned, the normal institutional fear of antagonizing any segment of the mass-communication industry, the normal sniffishness of teachers whose first concern is for literature, not the quality of national life. But beyond these items lies a grand turn of intellectual history—a development that by a paradox can be seen as determining the peculiar qualities of the new subliterate reading experience, as well as the peculiar timidities of *littérateurs*. The pursuit of this paradox is at every moment in danger of flying up into supersubtlety; and the "explanation" of pedagogical reticence that it suggests appears at first glance abstract. Nonetheless, the classroom situation that is shaped by the terms of the paradox is for the teacher not less than disablingly real.

As might be assumed, an attempt to characterize this situation requires

the restatement of some commonplaces about popular "reading matter" and masscult-midcult style. To speak of style is not to insist that the only appropriate context for scrutinizing the commercial literary culture is formal. Popular taste has a sociology as well as an ideology; the world of glossy pages is a holiday world not solely because of its manner, its characteristic ways of rendering experience, but also because it is untainted by purposefulness: no school, business, or government has turned it into Work. Neither is it to claim that the content of the glossy page (fantasies of sex, success, fame, and adventure) is without significance as a lure. It is to say that the holiday world of commercial culture is marked by a number of formal constants (tones, rhetorical patterns, dramatic stances) that offer one key to both its unity and its attractiveness.

Prime among these constants is the stance of nonassessment. Throughout mass- and midcult, the accepted rhetoric condemns the authoritative or judicial voice and disapproves undramatized summary—"undramatic" meaning here simply didactic. The prejudice named has not, needless to say, swept away all editorialists and silenced all moralized song. When college boys descend from bars (at three a.m. of a Labor Day morning) to the streets of an upstate New York resort (shouting, singing, and tossing beer cans through plateglass windows), the coverage provided by newspapers and news magazines does not aim at neutrality. When young wives set down (in letters to ladies' magazines) fierce grievances against lazy, unloving spouses, the editorial voice that answers does not strive for a permissive or sympathetic tone. When a blow is struck at a revered upper-middle-class convention or standard, magazines like the *New Yorker* do not report the news acceptingly. And (descending to a lower level), when confession magazines tell of some celebrity whose home has broken in divorce, their remarks are not commendatory.

What counts in sustaining the holiday experience, though, is that masscult reproof is no matter of a straightforward summarizing judgment. The reading matter of the 'sixties spares its audience the disturbance of an editorial voice speaking with an air of comprehension or inclusiveness. Its statements are *distributed* statements. They are not concentrated in paragraphs severe with assumptions about Duty and Responsibility. And their effect is to assign the task of naming the meaning of events not to the editor (or to the journal itself), but to a character in the scenario—or to the reader himself. Thus *Time* doesn't in its own editorial persona define beer-can hurlers as Depraved Youth; it closes its report on delin-

quency with a remark of a distant policeman. ("This is typical of what we're up against," said Captain Jim Glavas of the Los Angeles police department's juvenile division, "a complete disregard for everything—you can't give a reason for it. It seems to be a national malady. The standards seem to have disappeared, and we have kids without standards.") The case for *gentillesse* and old-fashioned manners, on the tennis court and elsewhere, is not argued by the voice of the *New Yorker* speaking in the "Talk of the Town"; it is instead reported, wrapped in quotation marks, and offered as the rumination of the codger or the longwinded old lady "who sometimes writes to us." The *Ladies' Home Journal* does not in truth answer the women who think ill of their husbands; instead it prints a fourteen-point test of expectations ("Check the qualities below that you want your husband to have") that the reader herself can take, and from which she may or may not rise with the conviction that in the past she has expected too much. The magazine of confessions absolutely refuses to provide a summary in place of "experience"; its first-person narratives ("When Divorce Split My World") are designed to thrust the reader into immediate situations. "When Faye and I faced the grim fact that our marriage could not be saved," runs the lead sentence of the agony of Doug McClure in a recent *True Confessions*, "we didn't expect it to be easy on us. The one person we were worried about was our little girl, Tane."

Adaptations or dabblings in this mode are numberless. The voice of the commercial ("I love you, Wolfschmidt" . . . "Marge, it's a white tornado!") is not that of the manufacturer; the voice of the opinionated essayist is represented by publishers (in subtitles) as that of an impersonal Report; the voice of the New York *Times* editorial page competes with an italicized box "featuring" a "Quotation of the Day." And, as should be acknowledged, a measure of the enthusiasm for the new mode is traceable simply to its convenience for writers and editors. These men know that formulating opinions, marshaling evidence, and organizing arguments convincing on their own terms is hard labor; and, in any case, they are eager to present themselves as modest untendentious types, aware of the inevitable partiality of any single understanding of affairs.

In the present context, however, the figure of interest is not the writer but the reader. His situation, as indicated, is holiday-like partly because the reading bazaar belongs to an unpurposeful funworld, but also because the bazaar appears unconcerned with "pushing" conclusions, summonses, or



demands. The "lightness" of his pleasures is guaranteed by the vocabulary, the subjects, and the text-photograph ratio of his reading matter, but also by its tone and dramatic stance: the scenarios do not "come out," judgment itself is represented as stage business, assessments of experience are mere snippets of dialogue, beats in the dramatized "rundown of events." Rapt in plasti-scene, as it were, the reader can transcend the plane of quarrel and conflict, and enter an airy undemanding world in which the proper response to any assertion, any summary, is not Yes or No but rather, "That's what he said." He may if he wishes smile at the police officer ruminating on the decay of standards—a simple uneducated man, probably sees a lot of ugliness, groping for the answer—but to seize such openings seems an act of pedantry. Why quarrel with a Los Angeles cop? Does he rule the world? That question, endlessly repeated (What is this voice to me?) habituates readers to nonresponse. The unpretentiousness of the summarizing remark—the obvious simplicity and candor—silences reservations: "—a lot in that," says the reader with a shrug, and the page is turned.

And it is in this succession of turnings and voices that a mass audience is created, a crowd of spectators conscious of experience only as a show not to be interrupted—a flow of events, remarks, events, remarks, the motion of which cannot be stopped, held fast, examined. We are "there," on the scene, but not responsibly, individually there, not there to be lectured at or convinced or asked to make up our minds. The world is dense with decisions, to be sure, everyone talking, deciding, valuing. But the decisions are overheard, not addressed to us: this world does not talk back, it asks nothing, it lets its eavesdroppers drift down and down through column on column of happenings into a sweet, easing unresponsiveness—even into wordlessness itself.

So much is familiar. And at first glance it would appear unlikely in the extreme that the teacher concerned with educating against the environment would be badly placed for contention. The pattern of such contention virtually shapes itself. Aware that criticism of the environment requires acknowledgment that an environment exists, the teacher begins by admitting the bad and the unliving into his classroom, where he subjects it to examination. His aim is to demonstrate that the twin effects of dramakitsch are to disguise opinion and to repress argument. In working toward this goal, he employs methods once tentatively approved by the schools in the 'thirties and 'forties—for ventures in "propaganda analysis."

That is, he points at moments in his exhibit when readers are in fact obliquely moralized at, hectored, teased into one or another position. And at the crisis of his exposition, he names the elements of anti-life implicit in the indirection at hand, and undertakes to establish that the reader who collects the parts of the distributed summary and brings their meaning to consciousness would arrive at an intuition of the cost of his holiday.

The apparent ease and reasonableness of his undertaking, though, are delusive, in large measure because the act of comparison just mentioned exacts a sacrifice to Statement that is considered offensive to taste and tact. It is precisely here that the connection between kitsch obliquity and academic noncombativeness appears. The holiday ideology of taste, with its eschewal of direct summary or crystallization, is actually a consequence of the revolution in the name of the dramatic that was fought and won generations ago in high culture. But the noncommercial inheritors of that revolution, men who regard it as a stroke for truth rather than for profit, are themselves as fully in its thrall—which is to say, as wary of crystallization—as are the men of commerce. On elevated grounds they have turned hostility to the didactic or nondramatic view of life into a positive value; they see the summarizing critic, the man who attempts to translate a story or poem from its own terms into those of moral discourse, as one who dishonors the shrine of art; and in their minds the act of isolating an anti-life position in one text and of comparing and contrasting it with a different position in another text is at best senseless and at worst a deceit.

As should be acknowledged, the sanctification of the dramatic cannot be thought of as a pointless aesthetic foible or accident: it constituted (at the end of the last century) an earnest response to an impressive series of developments in the history of science, faith, and society. The familiarity of the tags that in one fashion or another abuse the nondramatic (“Do not tell, show,”—“Trust the tale, not the teller,”—“A mind so fine that no idea could violate it,”—“We hate poetry that has a design on us”) is evidence in itself that for literary men this tradition is now dominant. The hero who validates the mode, Henry James, is ever more clearly seen as the most potent reformer of taste since Coleridge. It is past doubt that this writer’s struggle against simplistic unearned pontification was waged for a noble end, that of civilizing a nation out of its crudities of judgment and into a moral awareness adequate to the complexity of human affairs.

When all this is said, however, there is substance in the claim that the effect of the victory has been to weaken the hand of teachers resolved to

contend against bad literary experience. Such men may give assent to the homely proposition that every good poem is a criticism of bad poetry, but they are usually slow to set forth such critiques in their classrooms. The article of their deepest faith is that for a teacher the surest badge of vice is a determination to utter the summary statement, willingness to concentrate on what Graham Greene speaks of as "the moment of crystallization where the dominant theme is plainly expressed, when the private universe becomes visible even to the least sensitive reader."

I read somewhere [writes a Leavisite of considerable moral fervor, intelligence, and concern for public matters] an apocryphal story about the composer Schumann who was asked the "meaning" of one of his pieces of music. In answer he played it again. And when the questioner repeated his question, he played it again. The piece of music *is* the meaning: the poem, as Gertrude Stein might say, is the poem is the poem is the poem. [David Holbrook, "English for Maturity," 1962.]

The passage is perfectly characteristic of the literary bias here described. The poem *is* the meaning—hence, never restate or summarize it, never fall victim to the vulgarity of hunting the Message.

The argument that this bias incapacitates teachers and critics for the struggle as defined by Rosenfeld in the epigraph above\* can be put too strongly. The teacher is not altogether powerless: he can ask his classroom to "feel the life" in one exhibit and the unlivingness in another—and if he is a brilliant teacher, with a work of high art in hand, he can suggest (all obliquity and drama himself) the nature of the fullness to which he is responding without "other words." To the argument that ordinary students gain from such moments a *frisson* rather than an instrument of interrogation suitable for their own use, it can be said first that no instrument and no pedagogy yet contrived are proof against fools; and second, that to operate in more direct fashion (to compare, baldly, the good and the bad, the quick and the dead) is to waste hours in gossip. The "Epithalamion" of Spenser "as opposed to" the fourteen-point quiz in the *Ladies' Home Journal* on "What I Want My Husband To Be"—could such a class be endured? ask the enemies of Statement. Should the schools ever give houseroom to students who need to be told why the poem is "better" than the test? Is it not more sensible to keep "their" innerness and uncertainty

\* Isaac Rosenfeld, *The Age of Enormity* (New York: World, 1962). p. 308.

decently hidden under the stone? Does the teacher of literature actually harm anyone by pretending that those who leave his classroom, packing a copy of Pope or Yeats, have some other destination than a mail table piled high with *Gent* and *Mad* and *Time*?

The questions have their force, as is apparent, but they fail to quiet every doubt. The iamb, the trochee, the song of the vowels, the shape of metaphor, the relation between speaker and audience—these are matters about which it is assumed, in the world of masscult-midcult, that students will not be richly informed. Given this assumption, it is perhaps not eccentric to conclude that matters of statement and meaning are equally obscure. Training in such matters, moreover, needs to go beyond the quick Lawrentian tags set in vogue by Dr. Leavis. Of course the fourteen-point test is “anti-life,” but does that phrase reverberate in the student mind? Would it lose its force if amplified? (“Here is a mechanization of human relations, a turning outward into public formulae of matters that if felt at all can only be felt inwardly; if my choice is truly my choice, then it cannot be framed in fourteen queries for three million readers, pencils in hand.”) Of course, the policeman’s observation about “kids without standards” is anti-life: but does that phrase itself have any meaning until the hostility it objects to is understood?

The danger, that of vapid moralizing, is clear enough. But surely a terror of moralizing is not a value in itself; nor is summary that radiates the life of a text a crime. “Mr. James presents you with the proposition, not so much that there are no such things as oppressors and oppressed, but that, even in the act of oppressing, the oppressor isn’t having a very much better time than his victims.” This remark of Ford Madox Ford is scarcely empty for the student whose “assignment” is James’ “Portrait of a Lady”: it helps, it tells him where he has been, what truth the drama earns. The habit of deprecating the gift of naming such truths is probably not the key obstacle in the path of those who seek to bring the struggle for the lively and good into the university classrooms. Yet, considered as a handmaid to sniffish obliviousness, a prop to the teacher who is bored with struggle, it does matter. Once caught in the habit, the teacher loses his own consciousness that the difference between kitsch and its opposite is not finally that between holiday and every day, but between a world falsified, distanced, and dried out, and a world treated, as Conrad put it, “with the highest kind of justice.” It is on the wider diffusion of

exactly this consciousness that all serious hope rests for the redemption of the reading public.

That hope, it should be added, is currently a shade less wan than might be supposed. In England a trio of capable observers, Richard Wollheim, Richard Hoggart, and Raymond Williams, have been laboring in various ingenious ways to complicate the relations of high and low culture, and to blunt the bifurcating forces that support superstitious classifications ("easy" versus "difficult," "pretentious" versus "unpretentious," Them—the higher-ups—versus Us). In America certain elite schools and colleges have lately undertaken to confront specific productions in popular culture directly, with the aim of deciphering their "statements" and subjecting the latter to open assessment. And (more to the immediate point) there have been signs in recent days of a critical impatience with worship of the dramatic mode (witness the argument of Wayne Booth's "Rhetoric of Fiction")—an impatience that might well issue in less embarrassment about "messages."

To hold that the latter hope is at the moment the soundest is not to withdraw the argument for Contention. There are purposes to be served by confronting the bad and the unliving in the classroom; the sight of contempt for the cheap and meretricious is not always an ugly or a useless sight; the student who commits himself to the investigation of some popcultural lie has not necessarily polluted his mind. To repeat, the spirit of such enterprises *is* combative; poems and stories do breathe easiest in unembattled air; and, returning to the beginning, Isaac Rosenfeld surely was correct in asserting that the struggle needs to be conducted "joyously." What seems probable is that when teachers are free again to love the earned truths as well as the texture of what they teach, they will be less exacerbated by a sense of an overwhelming challenge evaded. At that moment true contention, successful struggle, may just conceivably begin.



# 2

## Commercial Publishing

WHETHER one likes the fact or deplors it, most of American book publishing is commercial. Dan Lacy, leading off this section, describes the boundaries of publishing economics—the volume in dollars earned and in copies sold—and the financial expectations that are realistic for authors and publishers.

Next, Marshall Best offers an analysis of the so-called “revolution” which allegedly has taken place in book publishing since the end of World War II, with specific reference to the much-heralded “paperback revolution.”

Jason Epstein, one of the prominent younger publishers, is critical of the complacency he finds among commercial book publishers. The commercial publisher, Mr. Epstein feels, should be more imaginative, daring and, perhaps, eccentric than he is now likely to be.

Frederick A. Praeger, one of the more successful of the post-World War II publishers, is similarly concerned with the creative aspects of publishing. In his article, he describes the publisher in his dual role of businessman and individualist—a duality which is not always easy to resolve.

One of the most important figures in any commercial publishing transaction is the literary agent. Perry Knowlton writes about what an agent can do (and cannot possibly do) for his client, the author; what the agent contributes from the publisher's standpoint; and what changes may be expected in the agent's role as middleman between author and publisher.





DAN LACY

## *The Economics of Publishing, or Adam Smith and Literature*

BETWEEN THE ARTIST and his audience stand the media of communication through which he must reach them: the opera companies, the theater managements, the broadcasting networks, the galleries, the publishing houses. To a degree, this has always been true. Throughout history an entrepreneur of some kind has assembled the artist's audience and given him the chance to be heard. Victorian authors as well as ours had to rely on publishers to disseminate their books; Mozart and Beethoven received the patronage of princes who were in a sense impresarios; Shakespeare wrote with both eyes on the needs and demands of the commercial theater of his day; and when Homer smote his lyre it was to satisfy a courtly market for flattering epics. But the media have grown so vast—armed with the technology of high-speed presses, television cameras, and broadcasting towers, all organized into complex industries—that they now assume an almost wholly new role.

They can offer an artist audiences and financial rewards beyond any earlier imagining. The nineteenth-century publisher or theater manager could count in thousands the audiences he could find for a successful author or playwright. Today a novel—or a “Rise and Fall of the Third Reich”—that is fortunate enough to be a book club choice and a successful paperback as well as a best seller may be read by millions. A television show may be seen by tens of millions. Indeed, it is said that more people witnessed a single televised performance of “Hamlet” a few years ago than the sum of all the audiences that had seen it enacted on all the stages of the world throughout the centuries since its opening night.

The financial rewards may be fitted to this scale of audience. Though only a few dozens or hundreds of unsalaried writers and composers may make enough from their work to live on, the occasional creator whose

work meets the highest criteria of success in the mass media may gain great wealth in a single stroke. The author of a smash best-selling novel may possibly receive from royalties and from book club, reprint, and motion picture rights a million dollars or more. The role of the media of communications *matters* now to a degree it never did before. One book finds an audience of 2,000—another, through televised adaptation as well as book sale, one of 30,000,000. Their suitability to the mass media is what determines the difference.

The role of the media matters also in another sense. The communications industries have become vast and largely autonomous enterprises, often imposing their own criteria upon the material they disseminate—criteria that may be unrelated either to the impulses of the creator or to the needs of the audience. The medium here tends to become the instrument of neither. Rather it may exist to serve its own ends, the principal one of which may be to return profits to an entrepreneur, primarily by attracting an appropriate audience for advertising. The medium thus may cease to be a mechanism existing in order to link a creator to an audience; rather the writer or composer may be hired to produce something to the medium's specifications that will aid it in assembling and "conditioning" an audience for an advertisement. What the writer or composer is able to disseminate and what the audience may be able to see or hear may hence be determined not by their own desires or interests but by extraneous criteria imposed by the needs of the media.

These needs of the media in turn reflect the facts of their technology and their economic organization. Contrary to a general impression, they do not often reflect the personal idiosyncrasies of their owners. No publisher or record company president or broadcasting station owner can successfully or continuously impose his own tastes or views on the material disseminated through his medium in defiance of the requirement of the medium itself.

Particularly do the economics and technology of the media affect what is widely or massively available to the public. It is true that almost any writer with any trace of perceptible merit can get into print in some way, even if he has to have his book published at his own expense. And it is true that a determined inquirer can ultimately get to read or hear almost anything that has been printed or performed. But it is the media themselves that determine which authors or composers have access to the mass audience and, in turn, what the cultural fare of the mass audience will be.

It may hence be worthwhile to look at one of the communications industries—in this case book publishing—in order to explore the relations between its economics and the actual communication between authors and readers in the United States.

We may begin by asking what a publisher does, what is the essential element in publishing. A publisher may hire authors to write books to his direction, and he may own a press on which to print them and bookstores in which to sell them. But in these activities he is being an author or a printer or a bookseller, not a publisher. The essence of publishing is pure entrepreneurship. The publisher contracts with an author for the right to issue his book; contracts with a printer and binder to have it manufactured; and then undertakes to promote it to the general or a special audience, to place it in the hands of wholesalers or bookstores where it will be sold, or to sell it by mail directly to schools or libraries or individuals. The publisher pays the costs and assumes the risks of issuing each book, and hence he occupies a highly speculative position. His role is somewhat analogous to that of a theater producer, or an independent film producer; but the investment required in publishing any single book is far less than in producing any single film or play. His economic role is quite different from that of a manufacturer, whose activities are based on his owning a factory for the physical production of a commodity, or from that of a newspaper publisher or broadcaster, whose power to decide what is disseminated to the public is derived from his ownership of a large and expensive physical plant.

Important consequences flow from this specialized, entrepreneurial role of book publishing. In the first place, one can become a publisher with a very small capital investment—at least, as compared with the cost of entering any of the other communications industries. No investment in physical equipment is necessary beyond office furniture. If one wishes to publish so few books that shipping and storage space cannot be economically used, it is quite possible to contract for shipping and warehousing too, and many rather large publishers do. If the size of the business will not justify a full-time sales force, one can engage the services of “commission men” who represent several publishers, or even arrange with a larger publisher to handle the entire sales and distribution operations. Similarly, a publisher too small to employ a full-time book designer or production department or a separate publicity staff can engage those services as well on an “as needed” basis.

The result is that almost anyone with a few thousand dollars who wants to "publish" a book may do so, and anyone with a capital of \$100,000 or even less can establish a "publishing house." New ones in fact are started annually, and there are several hundred firms in the United States that can properly be called book publishers, not to mention the hundreds or perhaps even thousands of business firms, foundations, churches, schools, committees, and citizen groups that issue books and pamphlets from time to time incidentally to their main activities. Hence, while there are only three major networks, two major press services, and in most cities only one newspaper publisher and not more than two or three television stations, there are hundreds of publishers to whom an author may turn. Each of these may expand or contract his output flexibly to respond to demand. If there is a demand none of them fills, new houses arise to meet it. Nor is publishing confined, as urban newspaper publishing or telecasting necessarily is, to men of great wealth with major investments to protect and hence with a bent toward the economic and political views of their class. All sorts of houses—commercial firms of widely ranging sizes, purely personal publishers, church and university presses, committees with a "cause," and others with varying motivations—compete for attention.

There are, of course, small magazines, small newspapers, and small radio stations. But the unique characteristic of small book publishers is that even the smallest has access, like the largest, to the entire national audience. Nothing published in the rural newspaper or the little magazine or broadcast by a small-town radio station can in that form reach beyond its local or previously defined special audience; but books published by very small publishers indeed may achieve very large sales. An outstanding example was the sale of more than 250,000 copies of "Arthritis and Common Sense," published by the Witkower Press in Hartford, Connecticut. Such best-selling novelists as Frank Yerby, Frances Parkinson Keyes, Grace Metalious, and James Baldwin are or have been published by houses that, though well established, are small in comparison with the giants of the industry.

Nor is a small publisher at an insuperable competitive disadvantage. There are undoubtedly economies in warehousing, shipping, and sales force that accrue to the larger publisher, as there may well be in overhead for the smaller publisher. But the competitive advantages of bigness that establish an almost irresistible trend to centralization and oligopoly in

most manufacturing industries—the economies of mass production and mass advertising—are absent or are mitigated in publishing. Competition for efficiency in manufacture is between printers rather than between publishers, and the large publisher and the small publisher may well use the same printer and benefit from the same efficiency. Similarly, in publishing one advertises the book, not the publishing house, and budgets are geared to the size of the edition, not the size of the publisher. The Rambler cannot possibly be advertised as Chevrolet is, but a book with an estimated sales potential of 20,000 copies is likely to have the same advertising allotment regardless of the size of the publisher.

In the number and variety of competing units, the ease with which they enter or leave the market place, and the flexibility with which each competitor can respond to changing demand, book publishing perhaps corresponds more closely than almost any other to the models of the classical economists who assumed perfect competition among atomized firms. It is Adam Smith's kind of industry.

Like the contractual relation with printers and binders, the publisher's contractual relation with authors providing for payments on a royalty basis has a major effect on the industry's communications function. In newspaper writing, in writing and composing for films and television, and in a great deal of magazine writing, the author or composer is an employee, hired on a salary or for a fixed fee to create a product to the specifications of the entrepreneur. In most book publishing, however, the author is not an employee but an independent partner of the publisher, sharing the publisher's risks and gains. He owns and controls his own work, which cannot be altered without his consent. And the dissemination of the author's work in the form in which he wants it is the object of the enterprise.

All the foregoing observations have been true of original publishing in free countries generally. What are the particular characteristics and dimensions of book publishing in the United States today? In the first place, it has grown very rapidly in recent years. Surveys done for the American Textbook Publishers Institute and the American Book Publishers Council, which between them embrace almost all book publishers of consequence in the United States, report an increase in the net sales of publishers from \$501 million in 1952 to \$1,240 million in 1961, an increase of about 150 percent in nine years. Though the prices of any given form of book have increased over those years, the average price of all books

has remained rather stable, because of the higher proportion of paper-bounds and inexpensive children's books in the total output. The total number of individual books sold has hence increased in about the same proportion as the net sales in dollars. The American people and their institutions are buying, even on a per-capita basis, about twice as many books as they were ten years ago.

As communications industries go, the book industry is now a big one, and it is probably growing faster than any of the others. Of this rather large complex, however, only a minor part is devoted to the original publishing of general books for the adult reader. The image of publishing as the handmaiden of literature is only a very small part of the comprehensive picture. The two biggest sectors of industry are rather the publication of textbooks (elementary, high school and college) with total receipts in 1961 of \$385 million, and the publication of encyclopedias, with the rather startlingly large volume of \$345 million. Other categories are small by comparison.

Book clubs are the next largest with receipts of about \$115 million, representing something over 75 million books. Then come children's books, with sales of \$103 million representing 227 million books. Nearly 175 million of these books, bringing in about \$35 million, are inexpensive children's books, the majority of them sold in supermarkets and similar outlets. Specialized and professional books (religious, law, medical, business, scientific and technical) are another big segment of the industry, with total sales of about \$85 million. Paperback sales are about \$97 million, representing about 305 million books. Of these, about 26 million books, selling at publishers' prices for \$16 million, are the higher priced "trade" paperbacks, usually published by general publishers and sold primarily through traditional book outlets. About 280 million books selling for \$81 million are the usually less expensive paperbacks sold primarily (though by no means exclusively) through the same outlets as magazines. University presses represent about \$12 million, and miscellaneous books not otherwise classified about \$10 million of the total.

Of the whole complex of book-publishing enterprises in the United States, therefore, only about \$87 million, or 7.5 percent, represents hard-cover, adult "trade" publishing. This roughly defines the area of original publishing of general books for the adult—the novels, biographies, histories, popular works on science, politics, and economics, the discussions of current issues, poetry and essays. This is what we think of traditionally

as "publishing," yet it represents only about 1/15 of the book publishing industry in the United States.

It is the economics of this small segment of the industry, however, that determines the character of the literature published in the United States, and it is worth examining in some detail. It will be useful to illustrate this by setting forth the specific economic pattern of the publishing of a single book. That pattern will not be exactly alike for any two books, varying as it will with price, size of edition, and methods of sale; but perhaps a sort of composite can be presented. Let us imagine a novel, retailing at \$5.00, of which about 6,500 copies have been printed. Let us suppose the publisher was lucky and sold about 6,000 of those, and that he was even luckier in that only about 1,000 of these were later returned by the bookstores as unsold. His total income, assuming an average 40 percent discount, would have been \$15,000. What would his costs have been? Production costs, including composition, paper, printing and binding, would probably have been about \$6,000. Author's royalties would probably have come to \$2,500, leaving a cost for the books themselves of \$8,500, or a gross margin of \$6,500.

Out of this a wide variety of expenses must be met. Editorial costs for work with the author and revising and copy editing the manuscript, together with a pro-rata share of the costs of reading and rejecting the dozens of unpublishable manuscripts that must be gone through to find one that is suitable, would come to about \$1,250—assuming an author who took little time in conference and produced a clean, easily handled manuscript. The book might have an advertising and promotion budget, including its share of overhead costs of the advertising and publicity department, of about \$2,200—too little really to do any good, but too much in fact for the publisher to afford. Salesmen's commissions and other selling costs would come at least to another \$750. An equal amount would be consumed in warehousing and shipping. Salaries of administrative personnel—bookkeepers, clerks, the comptroller, etc., employee benefits, rent, taxes, and other general overhead, when pro-rated among all the titles published—would come to another \$2,250.

The arithmetically minded reader will have noted that the expenses to be met out of the \$6,500 gross margin have totaled \$7,200, for a loss of \$700. How does the publisher stay in business—especially when we consider that our hypothetical book was on the whole a very fortunate one? Its sales were modest, but it did sell, while many books sell only a thousand

or two. Returns were only 20 percent of net sales, when often they run twice as high on new novels. And the shrewd hypothetical publisher did not overprint, or splurge on a big advertising campaign for an unsalable book, or make any of the other mistakes that invite major loss.

He stays in business for several reasons. Frequently, even usually, he has a juvenile department or a textbook line, or a paperback series, or any one or more of other specialized divisions that are more dependable money-makers and that carry part of the overhead of the trade department. And while he has many books that will lose a lot more, he hopes to have a few that are really major sellers and that can bring large profits. It need cost no more to select and edit a book that sells 100,000 copies than one that sells 5,000. Composition costs will become negligible, and printing and binding costs will be much less per copy because of the greater efficiency of longer printing runs. Royalties will run higher per copy, as most contracts provide that the royalty will increase from 10 percent of the retail price to 15 percent as sales increase. But all other per-copy prices will be markedly less, and the profits to the publisher as well as the returns to the author will be substantial.

The third and often the most important factor enabling the publisher to stay in business is the income from subsidiary rights, especially from book clubs and from paperbound reprints. His contract with the author will always provide that the publisher controls the reprint of the book in these forms. The income is normally evenly shared with the author. The author may convey to the publisher or reserve for himself or his agent various other rights, such as dramatization, film, broadcast, serialization, or translation, and sometimes British Commonwealth rights for publications in English. If these rights are conveyed to the publisher, his share of the income from them is usually less than half and may be only 25 percent or, in certain cases, even 10 percent. When one reads of the sale of movie rights to a book for \$100,000 or more, the transaction is almost always directly between the agent, acting for the author, and the film producer. The publisher is rarely involved in such bonanzas. Though confined generally to the more modest reprint rights—whether hardbound, paperbound, or book club—subsidiary rights income plays a major role in the economy of trade publishing.

On the average, it probably runs something over 8 percent of the income from the sales of hardcover books. Our hypothetical book's share would hence have been \$1,200 or a bit more for the publisher and an equal



amount for the author, enough to provide a thin edge of profit (about \$500) for the publisher and to increase the author's income from the book by half, from \$2,500 to \$3,700. But in practice the income from subsidiary rights is not distributed in this even manner. Most books are never reprinted at all and produce no subsidiary income, while a few books may hit a jackpot. The sale of rights to a major book club will produce from \$60,000 to \$100,000 to be shared with the author. A modestly successful—even an unsuccessful—reprint in a mass-market paperbound series will bring in from \$3,000 to \$5,000; guarantees of a minimum income of \$100,000 are no longer great rarities for major books, with the actual earnings more often than not being much larger; and guarantees have gone as high as \$400,000.

These windfalls of book club and reprint payments come, of course, to the books that also achieve success in the trade. To those that have shall be given. The consequence is that the economics of trade publishing somewhat resembles that of a shrewd and informed bettor at the race tracks, whose loss of a number of small bets is offset by an occasional substantial win. Probably the great majority of new "trade" books are published at a loss—which is usually not a great one unless the publisher has grossly overestimated its sales potentials and overinvested in printing or advertising. The continuation of the whole flow of books is thus dependent on how frequent and how "big" are the successes that by their income from large trade sales and large subsidiary rights serve to create a profit margin offsetting the more frequent small losses.

It would be logical to suppose that this dependence on "best-sellers" with substantial subsidiary-rights income would cause publishers to confine their offerings to works that had a good chance of achieving that kind of audience, and to refuse to publish the works that, whatever their merit, offered little hope of large sales. Possibly there is a marginal effect of this kind. Certainly the statistics that indicate that American publishers issue many fewer new titles every year than those of Japan, Great Britain, or Western Germany are often quoted to suggest such a limitation. But these statistics are largely illusory, being based on differing methods of defining "books" and on the exclusion from the American figures of government publications. Probably the differences are minor and, where they exist, are in the area of highly specialized technical, scientific, and professional publications. There does not appear to be any reason to believe that fiction or poetry or essays or histories, biographies,

and works on public affairs or science addressed to the layman, or any other "trade" books of any conceivable merit fail of publication. On the contrary, an examination of any considerable part of the more than 2,000 new novels published every year suggests not only that all with any perceptible merit are published, but that many appear without that justification.

How do we escape such a constriction in the number of books issued? Why do publishers continue to publish so vast a number of books when any consideration of the economics of their industry would suggest that it would be very much more profitable to publish many fewer titles with a high average edition sold of each? One reason is an engagingly persistent if unwary optimism on the part of publishers. When there are several dozen different trade publishers to whom a novel may be submitted, it is not difficult to find at least one whose hopeful eye may see possibilities not apparent to others. And who knows, the public favor can fall on odd choices; if it does not sell, the loss will not be very great; and just maybe . . .

A second reason is that if overhead costs are allocated pro rata among all titles published, as in our hypothetical case, most of them will be found to be unprofitable. Most publishers, however, will assume that they must in any case rent space, pay a management, support editorial, promotional, and sales staffs, and maintain warehousing and shipping facilities. If a new manuscript being considered promises to meet its direct costs and to contribute anything at all toward these general overhead items—even though that contribution may be less than a pro rata share—its publication may seem desirable. In economists' terms, publishers are likely to measure the returns from any new manuscript against the marginal or incremental cost of publishing it rather than against the total costs.

Finally, the competition among hundreds of publishers for publishable manuscripts is so great; the number of publishers (university presses, church publishers and the like) having some freedom from the necessity of pursuing profits is so large; and it is so relatively easy to establish new houses to issue worthy manuscripts that may fail of publication elsewhere, that any vacuum that may be left by the limiting practices of any single company or any number of companies is readily filled by others.

The economics of publishing hence permit the issuance of a most wide and varied range of writing, from comic books to the purest expressions of literature, from 25¢ infants' picture books to treatises on the most

arcane area of physics, from political tracts to prayerbooks. Its economics also makes publishing exceptionally hospitable to all the winds of political and economic belief and to the unpopular new forms of literary expression. This is true in part for a reason already pointed out: that anyone may, at relatively little cost, gain access to the national market. A Communist-oriented book-publishing house is, for example, quite practical, while a Communist daily newspaper is impractical and a Communist broadcasting station would be impossible. But it is also true for a number of other reasons. The organization of the publishing industry makes each publisher a broker between a variety of authors and their audiences rather than his being the spokesman for a point of view, as is the publisher of a newspaper or magazine. A single publisher may well publish political figures of the right, the left, and the center, hack writers of formula fiction as well as the most sensitive of poets, and sexy stories as well as manuals of chemical engineering. Hundreds of houses, each actively searching for every possible opportunity to make a dollar by bringing an author's product to an audience, even a small and specialized one, assure that no voice for which there is any listener is unheard. In the intense profit-seeking drive of a highly competitive, atomized industry there is a guarantee of the freedom of the press as effective as any in the Constitution.

Moreover, the economics of the industry permits a publisher to make money, or at least break even, if he can find an audience of, say, five thousand purchasers for a book over a two-year period. A general magazine, attempting a broad national circulation, could hardly make do with less than 100,000 people prepared to purchase every month at least; a nationally broadcast television program in prime time would have to assemble an audience of 5 million or so every week. Hence books are able to cater to minority tastes and interests in a way impossible to those media whose economics compel them to seek a larger audience. Nor do books have to take into account the needs of their advertisers, as do magazines, newspapers, and broadcasts. So long as it offers some chance of returning the modest cost of publishing, a book can be issued solely on its own merits without having to consider whether its purchasers make up an appropriate audience—in terms of size, interests, buying power, and mood—for the advertisement of a commodity. In magazines, for example, the most inconsequential, hack-written pieces on boating, stamp-collecting, bee-keeping, or hi-fi receivers will be in active demand, because people interested in those subjects make up in each case a

homogeneous market to which advertising can be profitably addressed and hence for whom numerous magazines can be published. But magazine outlets for a poem are limited, because people interested in poetry do not make up a homogeneous market, like people interested in stamp-collecting. From these pressures book publishing is happily free.

It is also remarkably free from the pressures of censorship. Economic pressure on a book publisher can have little effect. He is not exposed and vulnerable as a local newspaper or broadcasting station is. He cannot be boycotted, like a motion picture theater. The censor's only means of pressure against the publisher himself is to refuse to buy the book, and the sort of controversy that accompanies such organized refusal is likely to stimulate so much interest as to sell far more copies of the book elsewhere. (I am referring here to trade publishing; textbook and encyclopedia publishers are necessarily somewhat more exposed to pressure.) Even if a publisher can be pressed into refusing to publish a book, there remain hundreds of others, many of whom will be prepared to consider it. The economic organization of book publishing thus equips it admirably for the issuance of writings of the widest possible variety, for the smallest and most specialized audiences, and with the greatest freedom from pressures of conformity or censorship.

When we turn to the actual distribution of these publications to the people, however, the situation is quite different; and for the great majority of titles distribution is limited, ineffective, and costly. In part this weakness in distribution is a direct consequence of the strength of the industry in issuing materials. The very facts that about 15,000 new editions of the most diverse sorts appear annually, and that about 150,000 different titles are in print create the magnitude and difficulty of this task of making the whole range of American publishing available to more than 180 million people in thousands of cities, towns, and villages across the country. If it were harder to get a book published, it would be easier to get it distributed.

The traditional pattern of book distribution is, of course, through bookstores. The publisher, through a sales force and through advance advertising in trade publications, tries to get bookstores to stock a book for sale. He then tries to call public attention to the book in three ways: by advertising to the public; by sending liberal numbers of free review copies to newspapers, magazines, and technical journals; and by publicizing the book and its author as much as possible in all the media of communica-

tions. The bookseller in turn tries to promote books he considers salable by local advertising and direct mail (the cost of which may be shared by the publisher) and by such methods as window displays and word-of-mouth recommendations.

This method has severe limitations, both in scope and in cost. In the first place the number of bookstores in the United States is pitifully small. How many there are depends on what one calls a "bookstore," but there are perhaps 1,500 that stock a fairly wide representation of new hard-bound books. Contrary to the general impression, the number of bookstores is increasing rather rapidly, but it remains completely inadequate to the effective national distribution of books. This is particularly true in small towns and rural areas. Indeed, save for a few university communities and resort areas, it would be rare to find a good bookstore in a city or town of less than 50,000.

Even where there is a bookstore, and a good large one, it can rarely stock more than 3,000 to 4,000 titles, of which half or more may be standard older titles. This is likely to mean that even in a good bookstore there is only about one chance in ten that a new book will be in stock and perhaps one in a hundred that an older one will be. Still more discouraging is the fact that even when a bookstore exists, and even when it stocks a book on its shelves, it will be exposed to only a tiny fraction of the population. I would guess that hardly more than 1 percent of the adult population are regular patrons of a bookstore.

The same kinds of limitation apply to advertising and promotion. The fact that each one of the thousands of titles every year must be separately advertised imposes almost insuperable obstacles in the way of effective national advertising. It is as though General Motors for each tenth Chevrolet had to change the name, design, and characteristics of the car and launch a new national advertising campaign to sell the next ten cars. We have seen how pitifully small must be the advertising budget for the average single title, with the consequence that only for a very limited number of books is anything possible beyond one or two modest insertions in media with a relatively limited circulation, among a specially interested audience of book buyers. The advertising problem (except perhaps for encyclopedias and book clubs) is thus wholly different from that of the advertiser of a single brand that remains on sale indefinitely. As compared with other industries, publishers spend an extraordinarily high proportion of their total revenue on advertising that has a regrettably small impact.

The same thing is true of reviews. Even the *New York Times*, which reviews many more books than any other journal addressed to the general public, covers only about 20 percent of the annual output. Many books of major importance in specialized fields go entirely unnoticed in such general media, and it is by no means unknown for even National Book Award winners to go unreviewed in the major national journals.

The real problem is with the solid, meritorious book that is neither best-seller nor a major book club choice and that is not reprinted in a mass-market paperbound edition. Thousands of such books are published annually, and in their myriad diversity and range of content is the triumph of publishing. Yet, in consequence of all the difficulties described above, I suspect that for a typical book of this sort, one would find that in the overwhelming majority of counties in this country no copy had ever been seen in any bookstore or library, and that it had never been reviewed or even mentioned in any local newspaper or in any magazine or broadcast regularly read or seen. All the manifold intellectual and cultural resources offered in the vast annual flow of books pass unnoticed by the great majority of Americans and indeed unknown to them.

The fact that this method of distribution is ineffective does not make it inexpensive. Most of what a customer pays for a book in a bookstore goes not to get it written or printed or published, but rather to get it distributed to him. Trade books are usually sold to a bookseller at a discount that begins at 40 percent for multiple-copy (and some single-copy) orders and may rise with the size of the order to 46 percent or even 48 percent, and they are usually sold under the condition that the bookseller may return them for full credit if he does not succeed in selling them. In other words, of the \$5.00 a customer may pay for a novel, the bookseller may get \$2.00, the printer about \$1.00, the author about 75¢, and the publisher about \$1.25. But of the \$1.35 or \$1.40 expenses the publisher must meet from this (see above!), many are essentially distribution costs—sales, shipping, advertising and promotion—so that actually well over half the five dollars goes for distribution. And yet it is needed. Except for fast-moving best-sellers and some high-priced items, the bookseller's 40 percent probably does not meet his actual costs.

To break through these limitations, publishers have resorted to three major devices: book clubs, paperbounds sold through magazine wholesalers and other mass-market channels, and direct sales. Direct sales have been remarkably successful. These have taken two forms: house-to-house

or office-to-office selling and mail sales. The former is actually one of the oldest forms of bookselling in the United States, and it was commonplace in the nineteenth century for complete sets of major authors and other important works to be sold in that manner, often by subscription in advance of publication. Today, however, the need for high returns to salesmen permits this type of distribution only for expensive sets or specialized volumes like encyclopedias and medical and law books. More than one-fourth of the dollar volume of book sales goes through this channel, but it is irrelevant to the distribution of general books.

Mail sales have been more versatile. A conventional practice is to sell specialized, usually scholarly, books to potential buyers who can be readily identified and easily reached through specialized mailing lists or by relatively inexpensive advertising in learned or other specialized journals. Many university press books are sold in this way. When the potential purchasers of a book cannot be narrowly defined as any specific professional group, the costs of selling by mail rise sharply. It is usually possible to meet these costs in selling to the general public only if the work is rather expensive (usually \$10 or more) and if it offers something more to the buyer than the pleasure of reading it: for example, pride in a handsome and expensive possession like an art book or some aid to advancement. Neither method of direct sale is feasible for bringing most general books to the general public.

Book clubs and paperbounds were both adapted from the two principal magazine distribution techniques. The book club distributes books to subscribers through the mail, like magazine subscriptions. The mass-market paperbound in fact uses for its distribution the very same national distributors, local wholesalers, and individual newsstands used by magazines for their individual-copy circulation. Both these methods have been overwhelmingly successful in enlarging the audience for books and increasing the number distributed. Last year about 39 million hardbound adult "trade" (that is, general) books were sold outside book club channels, together with 26 million higher-priced "trade" paperbounds sold primarily through bookstores. This contrasts with about 280 million paperbounds sold primarily through mass-market channels and nearly 80 million books distributed through book clubs. This means that of approximately 425 million general adult books sold in the United States last year, about 360 million went through book club or mass-market channels. And only 39 million of the 65 million moving through tra-

ditional channels were hardbound. When it is further considered that a very considerable proportion of this 39 million copies was bought by libraries, it becomes evident that four general books out of five bought by or for individual American adults come to them through book club or mass-market channels. And many of the remaining fifth come as gifts rather than as purchases by the consumer himself.

These methods of sale have succeeded because they have surmounted the physical constraints of the bookstore and lessened the barriers of inertia. Rather than decide on a book and seek it out, one does nothing and the book club brings it. Paperbounds lie across one's daily path—on the newsstand, in the drugstore, in the grocery, at the cigar counter, in the bus terminal, at the railway station. They have also succeeded because they have sharply reduced the price of books, particularly in the case of the mass-market paperbound editions, which may sell for as little as one-eighth or even one-tenth the cost of an original hardbound edition. Indeed, the two go hand-in-hand: the ubiquitous display would be impractical for a book priced above the level of impulse buying; the price would be impossible except for mass distribution.

Why, then, not publish all or most books—and especially new books for the general audience—in paper bindings and with the same low prices achieve the same mass sale? A glance back to the analysis of the price structure of hardbound books should give the answer. Remember that of the price of a popular \$5.00 book, from 50¢ to 75¢ goes to the author and only about \$1.00 to the manufacturer and most of the rest to distribution costs. It is obvious that the sorts of savings achieved in mass-market paperbound editions must come primarily from the manner of distribution, not the manner of binding. Indeed, if books could be manufactured absolutely free, a \$5.00 book would still be a \$4.00 book unless other costs were reduced as well. Of course, the use of paper instead of board-and-cloth binding saves money; so do glueing in place of sewing and the use of smaller type and less expensive paper. So especially does printing 100,000 books at once on high-speed rotary press. Only books that can sell that many copies fairly quickly can achieve that kind of savings. Royalties come down too. On the fifty-cent edition they will be about 3¢, not the 75¢ of the popular \$5.00 edition, and the author will normally get only half of that if it is a reprint. Editorial costs go way down, because most paperbounds are reprints that have already been edited, and the selection process is far less costly. So, of course, do administrative, shipping, ware-



housing, and accounting costs per copy, when they are divided by the millions of copies flowing from the press.

But the principal savings must be found where the principal costs are found—in distribution. A mass-market paperbound must be sold with a cost for retailing of no more than 8¢ to 15¢ per copy and generally with only an infinitesimal cost for per-copy sales, advertising, and promotion. This means that the books must essentially sell themselves. They must be books of the sort that 100,000 or more people will buy on impulse if they see them displayed, either because the book or the author is well-known or because the subject or theme commands interest. And there must be an opportunity for exposure, because books can be sold in this way only to the extent that they are displayed in high-traffic locations for buyers to see. It is also obvious that with so small a return to the retailer, he cannot ordinarily afford to maintain and check extensive stocks or to order for a customer individual titles he does not happen to have in stock at the moment. Except in some bookstores specializing in paperbounds, the customer is dependent on the more or less accidental content of the racks at any given outlet at any given time. The lower price of mass-market paperbounds is hence not due primarily to its binding, or even to the lower cost of manufacture in general, but to savings in editing, introducing, and distributing it. These savings in turn are possible only for certain kinds of books, and only for a number of books not greater than can receive adequate exposure in available outlets. It has been possible through mass-market paperbounds to distribute billions of copies of thousands of titles to a much wider audience than could be reached by other means; but it is not possible to solve the problems of books in general merely by binding them in paper.

Many of the same observations apply to the higher-priced paperbacks usually published in much smaller editions (typically 5,000 to 20,000 copies) and distributed through conventional trade channels. The higher price not only permits a smaller edition; it also allows a much larger per-copy return to the bookseller. This in turn permits more selective stocking, personal assistance to customer, and special ordering (usually with a small added service charge) of books not in stock. Many more titles can be accommodated in this pattern of distribution, and new series appear frequently. A recent sampling shows that slightly more than half of the 2,500 paperbacks issued in a three-month period were in this \$1.00 to \$3.00 range. These so-called “trade” paperbacks are, however, like mass-

market paperbacks, dependent in large measure upon impulse buying of copies on display. The number in print has now far outrun the capacity of the largest paperback bookstore even to stock, much less to display. In consequence, paperbacks are beginning to encounter some of the same distribution problems as hardbacks. As soon as the savings of the largely automatic distribution of a reasonably small number of titles, from among which the user has only a limited choice, begin to diminish, costs begin to rise. When it becomes necessary to finance a distribution mechanism that will allow a user to take realistic advantage of the fact that nearly 20,000 books are available in paperbacks, the price of paperbacks must go up. This is indeed happening and, though production costs have also increased, higher distribution costs are perhaps the principal explanation of the recent trend toward higher paperback prices. The more broadly the paperbound format is used for general publishing, the more nearly do its price structure and distribution problems approach those of hardbound publishing.

The consequence of these economic factors is that American publishing functions responsively, even brilliantly, in meeting national needs for the *issuance* of books; but it is able to *distribute* effectively only those for which the audience is either very large or else very specialized and clearly defined. It can do a very good job for the scientific, technical, scholarly, or professional book whose potential buyers are reached through specialized journals or mailing lists. And it can do a good job with the classics and very popular books for which the potential audience can justify large-scale advertising and stocking in bookstores and distribution by book club or paperbound methods. It is the great body of books in between, for which there is neither a mass audience nor an identifiable specialized audience with which, relatively speaking, we fail. And yet it is in making just such books available that book publishing can perform its most distinctive function, providing a communication service that can be given by no other medium.

Publishing and book distribution are in a period of very rapid change today. Some of those changes have been viewed with apprehension as further emphasizing a limited number of intensively sold, commercially profitable books to the derogation of the broader flow of literature. Among these changes are the merger of a number of publishing houses into larger aggregations, and the transformation of a number of others into publicly held corporations in which there is substantial outside investment pre-

sumably interested only in financial returns. The effect of the mergers on trade publishing has been generally overestimated. Most recent mergers have involved bringing together units from different areas of publishing, not competitive with each other, into a horizontally integrated company, or else have not involved trade publishing at all. Only two or three mergers of consequence have coalesced companies both of whose prior interests were primarily in trade publishing. And these have been offset in part by the rise of new companies.

Less easy to evaluate is the consequence of "going public," since publicly held corporations have previously been almost unknown in trade publishing; but it will almost certainly be small. Even if it should have an effect in curtailing or redirecting the trade publishing activities of any single house, it can hardly affect the output of American publishing generally. Dozens of substantial trade houses remain under personal or family ownership, new houses are steadily being established, and any books refused as a result of new policies in one house can be quickly accepted by another. The greater size and strength of publishing houses may indeed have quite the opposite effect of providing new venture capital and enlarging the capacity to publish and distribute a widely diversified list.

Also feared has been the rise of discount-selling of books. Though this has been widespread only in some metropolitan areas (notably New York) and has been confined to limited numbers of best-selling titles, it has been viewed as the death-knell of general bookstores. Undoubtedly it has cost many bookstores some considerable numbers of sales of certain titles to which they could have normally looked for a major part of their profits. But the impact seems not to be as large as one might have feared. As we have noted, the number of bookstores is, in fact, growing rather rapidly on a national basis; and sales seem to be rising even in some of those quite near large discount houses. Other trends toward a broadening of the market for a wide variety of titles and a lessening of emphasis on a few "best-sellers" may help to offset this situation.

Much more important are the hopeful trends. One of the most important is the rapid growth of library service. This is not only important in itself, as bringing a wide diversity of books to people throughout the country, including small town and rural areas, but also as providing the publisher with a market for many serious books addressed to a small but general audience, which it might not otherwise be possible to publish at all. This is not the place to discuss library development, but it is a very large and

important factor in the economy of publishing as well as in the enrichment of education.

Also very hopeful are the educational developments that have led directly to a far wider and more varied demand for books at every level, from elementary school through college, and which in time should lead to a general elevation of the intellectual interests and book buying habits of the American people. It has been a principal factor in the rapid growth of paperbound publishing and the broadening of its scope.

The larger and more varied the book market, the better it can be served. With each major increase in book buying, more titles can progress to each level of book distribution. The doubling of per-capita book purchases in the last decade for example, has already made it possible to keep in print in paperbacks not merely a few hundred mysteries, westerns, and romances—as was the case at the beginning of the period—but nearly 20,000 titles covering every aspect of literature and scholarship. The same market growth has made it possible to expand book club distribution from a few dozen broadly popular general titles a year to the many hundreds that can now justify distribution through one of the nearly one hundred specialized book clubs. It has made possible the opening of the paperback and general book departments in the hundreds of college stores already mentioned. The proliferation of serious titles in such fields as science, public affairs, and international relations is another consequence.

There is every reason to suppose that the market will continue to grow rapidly and will double again within the decade. Simple increase in the adult population will accomplish much of this. The postwar crop of babies which has accounted for our population boom has not yet affected the market for adult books, but it will have an enormous impact on that market within the decade. So will the explosion of college enrollments, which will add an additional 3,500,000 to 4,000,000 students within the decade. The effect of this will be immediate in the books that students buy for themselves and in those that are bought for new or enlarged college libraries. It will be even greater in its effect on the educational characteristics of the future population. We shall soon have twice as many well-to-do college-educated adults as we have now.

The effect of this vastly increased book market not only on the size but also on the character of book publishing and distribution will be great. Books that can be published at all now can then be published in editions two or three times as large, with accompanying economies in manu-

facture and distribution. Small bookstores can become larger, and towns with no bookstores will be able to afford them. Mass distribution can be achieved for many titles that can now have only limited sale. There is a vicious circle in much publishing now: small markets leading to small editions, high costs, and inefficient distribution, ultimately restricting the market even further. The past decade has shown that for hundreds, even thousands, of titles a larger market can transform this into an upward spiral in which larger editions lead to lower costs and more and more efficient distribution which breaks through into even larger markets.

There is every reason to hope that over the next ten to twenty-five years an even more rapid increase in demand can effect such a transformation in the economics of publishing on a yet broader basis, embracing the whole of book publishing. If so, the consequence in enriching and diversifying the intellectual and cultural resources realistically available to Americans generally could be beneficent beyond measurement.

## *In Books, They Call It Revolution*

READERS AT LARGE are aware that some sort of major upheaval has occurred in book publishing since World War II. Seen from the inside, it is not a revolution but rather a series of skirmishes between established ways and innovations, in which many of the innovations have now clearly won the day. In the process, they have liberated a whole new populace of book readers. Paper covers are the manifest symbol. Readers who reached adulthood in the 'fifties are apt to take these as the present avatar of "book" just as their parents took cloth bindings.

Less manifest are other signs of change: the growth of book clubs and other forms of selling books by mail; the decline of the well-stocked personal bookshop; the lessening influence of the book review; and above all the mergers of small publishing firms with each other and with large firms into corporate structures in which Wall Street and public investment are taking an eager interest. The growth of the textbook is a separate story.

For the prerevolutionary pattern from which this departs, it is reasonable to look at the early 'twenties. In the later 'twenties, some of the seeds of change had already been planted, to grow through the 'thirties and the war years and produce recognizable mutations. The early 'twenties themselves were a time of new publishing houses, new book review media, and new authors, all of which until recently have dominated the scene. But the newness was more confirmation than innovation. The new was bringing fresh blood to the old, competing with the old in its own terms for an established reading audience of definable character. There was nothing revolutionary about it. The newness of the 'fifties and 'sixties is of a quite different order.

Characteristic of the old pattern was the private nature of book publishing. An English publisher has called it—not without irony, to be sure—"an occupation for gentlemen." Few were in it for money, it used to be

said—meaning that few were in it *only* for money; they knew that they could make more in other fields. A surprising amount of it was financed by private fortunes earned in more rewarding enterprises. Decency prevailed. Authors were rarely taken advantage of and rarely “stolen” by one publisher from another. Literary agents were not high-powered middlemen but kindly midwives interested in the welfare of both patients, the author and the publisher—and agents played a lesser role then than now. Though one of them was once jailed for embezzlement, none was ever prosecuted under the antitrust laws in those days.

It was assumed that books—at least the kind we are talking about—were sold through bookshops, or through book departments of larger stores, or to libraries (then including rental libraries). Other sales were incidental. The structure of the universally accepted book publisher’s contract (which survives today) measured the author’s income by the sales of copies through these outlets. Though he shared in other income, it was considered income from “subsidiary rights.”

The audience was more homogeneous. Taste in books, and the success of books, were determined to a large extent by recognized arbiters. The *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune* book supplements held sway in slightly different sectors. Favorite daily reviewers had their responsive followers. Weeklies such as the *Nation* and the *New Republic* could make if not break a book aimed at their particular clientele; and during the early ’twenties the *New Yorker* and *Time* (again in different sectors) became redoubtable influences. Certain lecturers (William Lyon Phelps is the paradigm) carried their great weight through women’s clubs.

It was only a little later that radio began to be felt. The first broadcast that made a great best-seller out of an unknown book (“Good-bye, Mr. Chips” in 1934) may not have been of marked cultural significance, but it offers an instructive contrast with its counterpart of the ’sixties, when the cult of personality on TV can cause a book called “Let This House Be Safe from Tigers” to sell in the hundred thousands. This is not an aspect of the revolution that can fruitfully be followed here; but someone else should trace the dynastic saga of the Alexanders, from Woolcott to King.

The final characteristic of the ’twenties to notice here is the lower cost of book production, lower not merely in relation to other prices but particularly in relation to the quantities printed of the same book. To produce 10,000 copies of a 300-page book might once have cost forty cents a copy;

to produce only 3,000 might have cost no more than an additional ten cents a copy. Today the same 10,000 copies cost twice as much; but the added cost in smaller quantities has probably tripled. This higher premium on the smaller printing is a factor to remember in considering the other changes.

Take the 'twenties, then, as a point of departure and look from there to the present scene. There are many other evidences, but the signs of change already suggested seem the most interesting to an observer from the inside—a member of a middle-sized, independent publishing house, where the notion has prevailed that books are published for the good of the publisher's soul as well as for the good of his pocketbook. With these prejudices exposed, he can speak more freely.

What, in general, is happening to books today? And what, in particular, does this mean for the marginal book, the book for a limited audience? This includes the book of great literary distinction or real originality of thought, too experimental to be ready for a large public; the book whose subject matter will interest only specialists, or whose language or method makes demands on the reader which necessarily restrict it to an elite. It includes the still imperfect book of the new creative writer who needs publication and an audience, however small, before he can develop his full powers. It includes most poetry, most philosophy, and much literary criticism.

No commercial publisher can live on such books. This is not a new fact. Most of them have always been published at a loss, paid for out of the profits of the more commercial books. Publishers have gone on publishing them; they recognize them as pledges to the future, or as ornaments to their imprints, or simply as acts of benevolence which satisfy their egos. But the squeeze on such books has been growing over the years; they have been becoming more and more of a luxury. The price spiral, with its premium on small editions, has been only one of the omens. Under the New Order, the question is whether there are any hopeful portents, or whether there will soon be no place for these marginal books at all.

Anyone talking about the so-called paperback revolution must remember certain distinctions which are obvious to the publishing world but not always understood by the public. Cheap paperback reprints on low-grade paper in small type, usually with eye-catching covers, and selling in the twenty-five-to-fifty-cent range, have been on sale at newsstands and in drugstores since the 'thirties. Minimum printings are fifty thousand; usually



they are much higher. These books, which annually sell their millions, have been mostly light entertainment or "self-help" (to wit, Dr. Spock), or cheap editions of popular clothbound best-sellers, or reprints of non-copyrighted "classics." They took over from the hardbound cheap editions of the 'twenties, and found a huge new market for books, largely in place of magazines, through new outlets that could be utilized at the lower price and in the smaller format. They were forerunners of the revolution; but they had small effect on the basic nature of original publishing, and have only a peripheral bearing on the newer developments.

The real revolution in this field began less than ten years ago, when so-called "quality paperbacks" or "bookstore paperbacks" appeared: paperbound editions of more serious books, predominantly nonfiction at first, attractively designed, printed on high-grade book paper, usually from the plates of the original edition, and selling at prices from about a dollar up (they now often go as high as \$2.95 or more). They are sold primarily in bookstores in competition with hardbound books, or in special paperback bookshops that have sprung up in the wake of their success. The original publishers were not on the barricades. Most of them welcomed this attack on the status quo; and in fact it had the happy result of proving that there was an unexpectedly large audience, measured in the tens of thousands, for many books of high intellectual or literary claims, even esoteric books, that these readers had not been able to afford to buy in their small, higher-priced, original editions. The new sales brought added income to authors and original publishers.

This innovation has caused great public rejoicing, and enthusiasts ask publishers every day: "Why aren't all books published as paperbacks to begin with?" Some dreamers, even among the publishers, think that this may be the outcome; and the dreamers often win. Most commercial publishers do not think so. Their reasons (greatly oversimplified here) are worth understanding even if they are proved wrong.

Many readers are unaware that the lower price of paperbacks is not a matter of the binding. The cheaper cover accounts for only a small fraction of the difference—perhaps fifteen or twenty cents a copy on a book that sells for \$5.00 in cloth and \$1.25 in paper. Some small additional saving comes from the larger quantities printed. More comes out of the heavy cost of type-setting and plate-making; still more from the editorial expense—the cost of finding new authors, nursing and sometimes financing them, guiding the manuscript through its revisions and through the hands

of the printer—all of which is usually absorbed by the high-priced edition. But the largest part of the saving comes from two sources to which the public rarely gives a thought: the cost of launching and advertising a new book, and the cost of author's royalties.

The sale of a paperback book depends largely on the customers' picking it off a display rack or shelf. They do so either because they have come in search of it, or because they recognize the title as one they have wanted to read, or because the cover tells them enough about it to make them think they want to read it, even if they have never heard of it before. If all bookbuyers were shoppers, and if there were fully-stocked displays within easy reach of all bookbuyers, the last of these motives might mean much more than it does; but at present this is very far from the case. The chances are that the first and second motives account for by far the larger part of the sale. Readers hear of a book in the first place, directly or indirectly, from advertising or from reviews. But advertising of individual titles does not normally figure in the paperback budget. That is another of the costs already borne by the original edition, to the tune of some ten percent of the retail price. On new original paperbacks, without a higher-priced forerunner, where is that money coming from? As to reviews, most of the existing media are unable to review paperbacks at any length, if at all. That function, too, is supplied now by the original edition. If more paperbacks were originals rather than reprints, this condition would undoubtedly change; but problems would still exist. Among them, the troublesome thought arises that many of the important reviewing media depend for their existence on book advertising.

Here we come to the small matter of the author's interest. Malcolm Cowley and others have pointed out what a large stake the author has in the savings that make the lower price of paperbacks possible, and how sharply his income might be reduced if only paperback editions were published. At present rates, the author earns less than one-eighth as much per copy from a paperback as from a hardcover book, although the paperback sells for about one-fourth as much. His share of the reader's dollar, in other words, is less than half as large. If the paperback sale is in *addition* to the regular sale, these earnings can be considered a nice increment. But if the paperback were the only sale, it would have to make up for the present income from both editions. To do this, it would need its present sale as a reprint, *plus more than eight times the sale that the hardcover edition would have had*, or the author would be the loser. There is

no evidence at all, as yet, that the average "quality paperback" can multiply at such a rate. At present it appears that the median sale, contrary to the public's inflated notion, is less than twenty thousand copies per title.

Other sacrifices, too, might be in store for the author. Diminished individual advertising, and diminished reviews, can affect the author's career as well as the book's. Libraries, which some authors regard as their stake in immortality, cannot now use paperbound books—nor can most book clubs as now constituted. Clearly, the author would have a good deal to lose.

Compensations may be found—higher prices, for example, to permit higher royalties and advertising budgets. Possibly the market can defy the law of diminishing returns and continue to expand in spite of higher prices and more competition, so that an average of twice the current figure becomes normal. New means of distribution are being tried: mail-order selling through catalogs; list advertising; the book club type of operation such as the "*Time* Reading Program," which has already enrolled at least 100,000 people to receive three or four chosen "quality" titles in soft cover format every two months.

While these measures would not solve all the problems of *original* paperback publishing, they hold great hope for the growth of the audience for good reprints. Regardless of the shape of the future, these attractive newcomers in the book world have already brought abundance to thousands of apparently famished serious readers. If this be revolution, let us make the most of it.

Less spectacular only because less sudden has been the growth of book clubs. Since the Book-of-the-Month Club made its inspired debut in 1926, followed quickly by the Literary Guild and much later by the Reader's Digest Book Club, millions of readers through dozens of clubs large and small have acquired the habit of obtaining their books (in many cases *all* their books) by mail. While some of these readers were formerly supplied by bookstores—and many still are, as to books not offered by the clubs—probably a very large majority had never set foot in a bookstore and many had never bought a new book, except for school, in their lives. Hardly anyone would deny today that the clubs have not only increased the reading of better-than-average books among the existing audience, but also have brought to light a whole new public of sizable dimensions.

The obvious pitfalls—standardization, emphasis on a few books chosen almost at random among many equally or more deserving, the lowering

of standards by catering to the common denominator—have been met in some degree, at least, by two conspicuous postwar developments. The clubs have learned that it is to their advantage not to concentrate too heavily on a single selection, but to diversify their offerings with selected lists of alternates, also recommended but mailed only on the member's order, or as premiums or bonuses for other purchases. From the clubs' point of view, this helps them not only to hold an increasingly disparate membership, but also to profit from the sale of other books in addition to the main selections. *Pro bono publico*, it makes available to this new mail-order audience a much wider range of books, including many of high quality and for limited tastes. God and Mammon are both served.

The other development, which tends in the same direction, is the growth of many small clubs serving specialized interests, such as history, science, belles lettres, the arts, philosophy, and offering selections, with inviting catalogs of alternates, in these particular fields. Since their distributional goals are geared to an audience of ten thousand or less, in contrast to the larger clubs' hundreds of thousands, they can afford to be far more selective. From the point of view of getting good books to the public, they provide a healthy variant to the pattern. The relatively small quantities they distribute, at a much reduced income per copy for author and publisher, will not determine the fate of all marginal books; but they do sometimes turn the figures from red to black—or at least to a pale gray.

One of the more glamorous developments in mail-order sales is the "made book" (sometimes called "non-book"). This is a lavish commercial package usually created by one of the big magazines, largely from material in its files, and sold primarily by mail in advance to its captive audience of subscribers. *Life's* science series and some of the handsome books of *American Heritage* are outstanding examples. Using color plates and research, if not text, already paid for by the magazine, and having a guaranteed advance sale, they can be offered at prices that are low in terms of ordinary book production, and some of them sell in the hundred thousands. They represent great ingenuity and book-making skill, as well as shrewd merchandising; and they reflect the awakening of the large magazine publishers to the fact that books can be a profitable commodity. To the student of the revolution, they suggest one other thought: that elegant table books may have become a status symbol for readers of the mass magazines.

If personal bookshops play a diminished role today, this does not mean

that bookstores as such are disappearing, or are likely to disappear. There are many more of them now than there were in the 'twenties. But their increase has not kept pace with the growth of population, and their volume of business in books alone has lagged still farther behind. Book distribution has gone around and far beyond them through other channels. This was inevitable if books were to reach more people; the bookshops by their nature and the nature of the product could never have filled all the needs of the potential book-reading public, and new ways to reach it had to develop.

Many booksellers feel threatened by what appears to be the loss of their customers to other suppliers, such as book clubs, mail-order selling, or the new paperback outlets. It is equally reasonable, however, to think that what they are aware of losing is not so much their own former business as a share in the new business that the new channels have tapped; and that their regular trade is holding its own and even growing, though not at the rate of the book-reading public as a whole. Meanwhile, most booksellers have added new lines of merchandise, such as records, to diversify their wares. Without making light of their fears, it is fair to say that they seem to be surviving.

In doing so, however, they have undeniably suffered two losses which bear directly on marginal books. The new shops, and the healthiest survivors of the old, are not the well-stocked personal shops of the 'twenties. Their new kinds of merchandise, along with the great increase of new titles and new editions (including bookstore paperbacks), have made it more and more difficult for them to keep a representative stock of books. For turnover to meet their rising costs, they must concentrate on the faster moving titles, at the expense of the special and marginal books. And somewhere along the way many of them have lost the trained personnel, the well-informed clerk, the true bibliophile, who used to accomplish such miracles in the propagation of the faith. Again the loss is to the marginal new book of quality, which may need special pointing-out to readers before it can make its way.

Parallel with these developments, but of a different order and not limited to the book world, are the changes in public taste. There has been a diffusion of the attention that used to be focused on a few pre-eminent objects of the common culture. Instead of the mere dichotomy that worries Sir Charles Snow, the view can be held that a much larger number of cultures now exists, each pursuing its objectives without much communi-

cation from one to another. Thus the opinion-making function has been diluted. In Laski's phrase, "We no longer hold the great ends of life in common." If this is true, it has a definite bearing on the fate of serious books. The trend toward conformity, the boggy of most observers, in this respect is reversed. The increase in the number of new books published each year is greater than the growth rate in other statistical respects. In this context, the book intended for a special audience has a lessened chance of being noticed and of reaching that audience. If the *New York Times*, for example, has twice as many books to review in the space available, the chances for each are reduced by fifty percent. Diversity decreases the attention for any given book—and so makes it economically that much more vulnerable.

"The curse of Bigness," as Brandeis called it long ago, may prove to be today's greatest threat to the kind of books we are talking about: the books that ought to be published, that are needed by a particular audience, that help to develop new writers—but that do not show a profit.

While costs of labor and materials were rising faster than retail book prices could, one saving that publishers could effect, other than just to eliminate these losers, was a reduction of their operating expenses through greater efficiency. This has led many of them into mechanization, where that could be applied; it has also led them into combined operations with other houses in such areas as shipping, billing, sometimes manufacturing, sometimes even selling. It was necessary, and it is good, and more of it is in order. As long as it remains below the editorial level, it is not Bigness in the dangerous sense.

That danger has arisen from another source. In brief, it became apparent in the 'fifties that book publishing *could* be profitable—especially if the publisher had textbooks and children's books to respond to the growth in population. This fact interested Wall Street. It also interested large companies with related products, such as magazine and newspaper corporations, paper manufacturers and the like. Here was a chance to enter an imperfectly exploited field, and a chance to diversify holdings. But small independent publishers, privately controlled, are not the best bait for these eager dollars; and this has led to mergers, the buying up of moribund lines, stock manipulations, and either "going public" by the sale of stocks on the exchange, or becoming an appendage to a larger enterprise, or both.

In either case the control tends to pass to outsiders who are in it,

naturally enough, for the profits it will produce. Many of them are the highest-minded of men, with an even greater respect for literature, perhaps, because it is not part of their daily experience. One of our leading men of letters is still published with distinction as well as profit by a company owned and run by outside financial interests. He is happy to have as his editor now a man who was himself a banker, and before that a professional athlete, up to the day when the new owners put him in charge of the editorial department. This has turned out to be a fortunate stroke. But we have a right to wonder whether even this exceptional man, or his counterpart fifty years ago, would have recognized the author's promise when he brought in his first manuscript.

For the present, be it said, the same individuals in most cases still control the choice of books in these big combines. They are wisely given the editorial reins, and their personal tastes and standards are unimpaired. Yet it will be hard for them not to think increasingly of the annual report to stockholders. They know how many weary words it takes to explain away a loss of several hundred dollars on Professor Smurch's "Mimicry in Butterflies," though he heads the philosophy department at Harleton; or to account for a sale of only 1,900, at a loss of two or three thousand dollars, for Xenia Kastinou's novel translated from the modern Greek, though she may some day win the Nobel Prize. And as these individuals retire from the scene, their successors will be hired by the bankers and deputies of Ownership.

There is a side effect of Bigness which also bears on the problem of the marginal book. Bigness attracts the big. The monoliths, having more capital to risk, can afford to offer larger bait to the purely commercial authors—the ones most likely to be profitable. Though these authors will not by any means be sure of doing better for themselves in the end than they would on a smaller list with more personal attention, the lure of the big advance and big advertising guarantees can be irresistible. When a smaller publisher loses such an author—perhaps after large and patient investments of time and money in his earlier and less successful books—it further reduces his capacity for the marginal books, in which the big fellows are not interested. And so the squeeze continues.

In most of these changes we can cheerfully read auguries of long-term gains in book reading. The book clubs and other mail-order methods, and the proliferation of the paperback, have enormously increased it already. Possibly the quantitative growth provides a base for qualitative growth as

well; but the immediate prospect seems dark for new books of interest only to special tastes.

Is there hope in small new private publishers, operating on a limited overhead, perhaps distributing through an established sales organization while they concentrate their talents on editing, design, and promotion? Many have come and gone in the last few years. In competitive money-making terms, there is no hope. Others will try, for there will always be hobbyists, philanthropists, and plain martyrs. The cause of good books has always had enthusiasts, and publishing, which considers itself on the border between a business and a profession, attracts individualists. But as private fortunes shrink and are taxed away, the chances dwindle.

Is there hope of subsidies from the foundations for worthy books? This appears strictly logical. The foundations have been open-handed, sometimes bewilderingly so, in support of the *writing* of such books. Yet they have conspicuously shied away from taking the obvious next step and helping these books to reach their intended audiences. The explanation that this would involve them commercially, jeopardizing their tax-exempt status, has never seemed conclusive to publishers. A little ingenuity from the lawyers, or sweet reasonableness from the tax-makers, should be able to find a way. And indeed the Ford Foundation, for example, has been generous in its help to university presses, where profits do not show—though they sometimes occur. This is at least a partial answer to the problem of getting good noncommercial books published; but it only increases the squeeze on the commercial publisher. Since he cannot compete in costs with the subsidized books, he is all the more inclined to let such books go.

Is there hope in more distribution for this kind of book by mail? This there probably is, though its costs are great, particularly with books for a special audience not easily singled out. Suggesting a solution does not solve the problem. But already the smaller, more specialized book clubs, as we have seen, are finding that their selective audiences will buy these books by mail.

Finally, what hope do the paperbacks offer? At the moment, the very readers who are the best potential audience for new, quality books are inundated with the flood of paperback reprints. All the known treasures of many years are suddenly within their reach. Most of these readers now have neither time nor money left for the new hardcover originals, and this has greatly aggravated their immediate plight. But the known



treasures are rapidly being exhausted. Before long a more normal conversion rate is likely to be restored. In that event, there may have been a real gain for the marginal book of quality. Knowing that an edition in paper may follow the edition in cloth, the publisher can better afford the risk. Some worthy books that would otherwise have had to be turned down by commercial publishers have recently found acceptance on this ground alone. Not all of them, by any means, have justified themselves: after the trial run in cloth, the judgment of the critics or the indifference of even the supposed special audience has canceled them out for paperback reprinting. The paperback lines, too, must be selective. But they will continue to hunger for good new titles; and this gives hope.

## *A Criticism of Commercial Publishing*

*I seemed to have shut a door between me and all publishers' addresses and book lists. I said to myself, Now I can write.*

—WILLIAM FAULKNER

AN ADVANTAGE that trade-book publishers have over television producers and university professors is that they can, if they want, confront their audience almost as they please, if what pleases them is not grossly absurd or libelous or narrowly obscene. For the publishing business can still be carried on largely within the interstices of modern culture, where eccentric forms continue to flourish in the few remaining pools of life. If a publisher wishes, he can ignore political necessity where even the President himself, surrounded by press agents and pollsters, must wince privately, smile wisely, and put off action for another day.

This unique advantage that publishers have derives from the fact that the audience for books is scattered and fragmentary, and is presumed by most Americans to be ineffectual. Yet while the parts of that audience are numerous and diverse, often they are large enough to buy the six or seven thousand copies that make the average book profitable. A smart publisher can stay in business very nicely on this basis. And because publishers do not have to depend on a mass market, they can occasionally awaken a latent impulse which might otherwise have remained inert in the great fog-bound American whale, and thus effect something like a political change, if only locally and for the time being. Consider, for example, the stubborn pressure exerted by the brave publication of "The Tropic of

Cancer" on the stupid and obscene obscenity laws. Perhaps this is not much, given the kinds of political problems we are facing these days. Still, it is more than the politicians have been able to do.

Publishers' imprints tend not to mean much to the people who buy books. Who really cares, when he is buying a book by Herman Wouk or Plato or J. Edgar Hoover, whether it is published by Random House or Harper's or the Atlantic Monthly Press? And while publishers will occasionally argue to the contrary, insisting that imprints do make a difference, they are likely to exaggerate. Privately, I suspect, they are thankful for their relative anonymity and for the freedom it gives them. *McCall's* has to be *McCall's*, issue after issue, and so does the *New York Times*. Like famous actors or certain kinds of neurotics, they are trapped within rigid images of themselves and risk being immobilized by them.

In the case of certain actors and certain magazines and newspapers as well, this immobility can become total, with catastrophic results. Similarly with television: if CBS violates a taboo on Monday, it is unlikely to hear the end of it till the following Wednesday, and it will be more careful in the future. But publishers can be as quixotic as they like and, as often happens, they need obey no higher law than their personal preferences. If they feel like advocating adultery, illiteracy, revolution, or murder there is really nothing to stop them. They can praise the king one day and ridicule him the next. There is almost no limit to what they can print, and there is almost no cause to which they cannot lend their imprints, because, for better or worse, almost no one in America really takes books that seriously. There is a pretense of caring, especially among policemen when their prurience is aroused; but the caring is not really deep. From this indifference publishers derive a unique and marvelous freedom. Alas, they seldom make the most of it, and this is shameful, for book publishers are, I believe, the only professional group left in America still free to contribute effectively to the birth of genuine political ideas, and thus to implement the fundamental changes that are needed in our society if it is not to collapse utterly.

In the mass media, the freedom of the press, which once was everybody's prerogative in America, is limited to a handful of Sarnoffs, Luces, McCormicks, and Sulzburgers. It takes a fortune to go into this business on anything like an influential scale, and even to start a magazine like the *New Republic* or *Commentary* is not the sort of thing one does casually. But all anyone needs to become a book publisher is a good manuscript

and a few thousand dollars to pay the printer—say, six or seven thousand for a three-hundred-page manuscript. The rest is easy, at least in principle, especially since there are only 1,804 bookstores in America, of which only a few hundred really count. If the book starts to sell in these, the other 1,500 will hear about it soon enough and begin to order it from the jobbers. There is no reason at all that such a book, in which the publisher has invested his six or seven thousand dollars, cannot become a great best-seller and reach as many people as *Time* or even Mitch Miller. Almost anyone could have published "Gone With The Wind" and the results would have been about the same. And this is true for just about any book that gets on the best-seller list.

The problem arises when the publisher decides to try it a second time. One good manuscript is not so hard to find if you put your mind to it and have patience. To find a second one requires a little luck and even more patience and if the publisher decides to settle down and make a life's work of it, hiring a staff and putting out a regular number of books every year, then his troubles become considerable. He may even find himself publishing books he does not like at all, hoping that they will make enough money to support his staff and keep him in business. But then, why stay in business?

Still, by the means I have just described, it should be possible for just about anyone with sufficient interest and energy to publish books as radical as "Das Kapital" or "The Interpretation of Dreams" were in their day and thus make a fundamental contribution to social change—not, of course, necessarily equal to that of Marx or Freud, but indispensable nevertheless, especially if there is no one else willing to publish such books, as is often the case. But now I seem to have made a large assumption, which includes an element or two of absurdity. I appear to be saying that such books as "Das Kapital" and "The Interpretation of Dreams" can be turned up by enterprising publishers if only they try hard enough. And this really does not seem to be the case. Most publishers spend their lives hunting for such plums and never find them. It would seem that such books are in their very nature rather scarce. The question is: need they be? And are publishers looking quite as hard for them as they say they are? Are they indeed what publishers are really looking for at all?

The special quality of such books as these—or of any book which sets out to upset the world—is that they are unprecedented. Nobody is prepared for them, and it takes a keen eye and a special kind of spirit to

discern that they have any quality at all—or at least enough to justify the very real risk involved in publishing them. On the record, most publishers have not been famous for such keen eyes or such bold spirits. Nor have they been much interested in encouraging fundamental changes in their societies. Like everyone else, they have been willing to let the politicians take care of this function, knowing that the politicians cannot or will not do anything about it. Thus publishers have not been especially ardent in seeking out obscure polemicists with radical new proposals to make.

Indeed, they have been so remiss in this respect as to have helped create the impression that such writers should expect as a matter of course not to see their works in print at all—at least, not for quite a while. Over the years the cumulative effect of this attitude may conceivably have been to discourage almost everyone but the genuinely insane from trying to say what he may in his heart have wanted to say, and to turn whatever his talents and virtues may have been to silence or into the kind of product with which publishers are accustomed to deal. The conventional answer to this argument is that there are in fact no really good books that do not get published, no matter how radical they may be (for example, “*Lolita*”). But then, think of all the books that do not get written at all.

In stating the case so broadly, I have undoubtedly been unfair to my profession. We have no more found a way out of the cash nexus than anyone else, yet we still publish all sorts of experimental and avant-garde fiction, and once in a while a little poetry. For every book by a general, there are at least three on disarmament, urging an end to generals altogether. But halt! The avant-garde threw down its arms nearly forty years ago and settled for early retirement, or went out to Hollywood and died. Where were the publishers then? Haven’t they arrived on the scene just a little late? And as for the books on disarmament, none I know has proceeded from what seem to be the fundamental questions: What is this Cold War all about in the first place? And why go on with it? Are *any* of its premises any longer worth the inconvenience that it puts us to? Whatever the answers, the questions are worth asking. But who asks them? And who would publish the answers? The avant-kitsch, as one of my friends calls it, that we knock down so many forests to publish is in the long run not likely to be worth displacing all those sparrows from their nests, and if one measures the political writing that we tend to get these days against the lovely trees that are ground to pulp on which to print them, who would not prefer to keep the woods intact?

Good books do get published. The mysterious combination of instinct, energy, and ambition that makes a good writer dies hard. The whole dead weight of the twentieth century has still not succeeded in crushing the eccentric impulse that makes such writers as Edmund Wilson, Robert Lowell, John O'Hara, and Paul Goodman go on with their work. But one feels about these writers that they do not really need the publishers in order to be heard. If all the presses were to vanish tomorrow they would still, somehow, get through. The publisher's task with such writers as these is minimal, requiring only that he be courteous, efficient, and self-effacing, like a good valet to whom one hands over his suit expecting it to come back promptly and with all the buttons in the right places. But while the publisher may take pride in his work, he should always remember that the trousers are not by any means his.

I notice these days a certain despair among my colleagues in the publishing business, more conscious in the wiser ones, but still enough to trouble those who are not so sensitive to their predicament. For the time being, the joy seems to have gone out of the work and, while the industry thrives and everyone seems to be making money, almost everyone sooner or later gets around to the drudgery and boredom of it all. Everywhere I seem to hear (and it is not just my own echo) that it is not what it used to be in the book business; that everything has grown too complicated; that the simple pleasure one once could take in publishing a worthwhile book comes less often now and is soon engulfed in all the effort one spends just to keep the business going.

I wonder if the reason for this may not be that we are all oppressed by the great responsibilities that our unique freedom imposes on us; that we all know, one way or another, what we should be doing—because we are still free to do it—but that none of us is really doing it at all. Perhaps we have even become at last like our cousins on the big magazines or on television or in the universities—frozen in the system and powerless, like them, to do anything about it.

## *The Publisher as an Individualist*

MY SUBJECT, broadly described, is "the role of individual initiative in publishing, especially in building and expanding a list." Apparently it is the editor's judgment that I am one of the publishers who have been reasonably successful since World War II without making too many concessions to purely financial considerations and to certain trends toward mergers and "bigness." This is the editor's rationale—and not necessarily mine. But it is certainly true that my company has relentlessly pursued and expanded a publishing program whose outlines were firmly set in its first years, a program that reflects a personal approach and personal convictions.

Publishing as a profession remains incurably romantic, given to folklorist notions that the industry is not ruled by huge mechanized, data-processing, push-button armies, and that there is some sort of arena in which a splendidly but primitively armed knight can hurl his spears at a mechanical monster and get away with it, to the rousing acclaim of the audience. I have tried this unequal combat and lost quite a bit of blood in it, and I must assure the skeptical but probably also romantic reader that this sort of battle, especially if protracted, tires a man out. With luck, one has a chance, but in order to stay in the running and last round after round, one must at least mechanize the use of one's time and one's logistical establishment so that, in the end, the romantic image is reduced to the knight's crest, barely visible atop a tank turret. I will not say that I do not enjoy the role ascribed to me as one of the last individuals in a business whose main contenders are swiftly merging into oversized industrial entities, but it is obviously an exaggerated, romantic image. I cannot make any promise as to how long we can stand alone. Already we find, increasingly, that the necessity and the pleasure of survival demand extremely efficient managerial processes and the proliferation of electronic gadgetry.

Perhaps a few of my own working principles would be in order at this

point. Publishing is a highly professional activity, conditioned by the economic considerations of the literary marketplace and by the strictures of community service. A publisher might be defined as the creator of editorial concepts and ideas, ready to make maximum use of the intellectual and material resources at his disposal, to take care of the real or imagined needs of a real or imagined audience. Success is understood as an accomplishment in terms of a publishing ideal—as the completion of a project that is meaningful, is constructive, performs a useful service to the community, and yields at least a reasonable financial return. These definitions are probably as ambiguous and ambivalent as is publishing in general—and they are somewhat romantic—but I hope they may serve as guideposts in what must, given the terms, be a personal and at times autobiographical tour through the publishing process as I see it.

Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publisher, is a medium-sized company with a yearly sales volume of approximately \$2 million and a staff of 62 employees, including a modest operation in London. It is a specialized publishing firm, emphasizing world affairs and contemporary history, military affairs and military theory, international economics, and sociology and anthropology, roughly in that order. Our first love and still our major preoccupation is international politics, especially the governments and politics of the Soviet and Communist Chinese orbits. On the other hand, we are also very active in art, architecture, and archaeology. World affairs and art may seem an unlikely combination. They are. Their *raison d'être* is a simple one. We are interested in both, but even in publishing art books our aim is to inform. We hate the “non-book,” the pretty package.

Estimates for 1963 indicate that about 30 percent of our list is of American origin or authorship and is produced in the United States, an additional 35 percent is of foreign authorship but also is produced in the United States, and the remaining 35 percent is wholly of foreign origin, produced in Europe and imported. The Praeger net is cast as widely as possible; the daily outflow of letters to our authors covers the world, from Washington to Addis Ababa to Kuala Lumpur. Our product, both hardcover books and quality paperbacks, is merchandised nationally and internationally; the main sales effort goes into direct mail aimed especially at library, government, and academic markets here and abroad.

The company was born in 1950, and the years since then have been a succession of 80-hour work weeks of constant planning, scheming, sweating, brainstorming, not only on my part but also on the part of my asso-



ciates; of reorganizations and even re-reorganizations; full of the schizophrenic experience of living precariously in the present and dangerously in the future, and dreaming bravely about the still more distant future.

It all started after I came back from Army and government service in Europe. My first attempt was in exporting books, but I soon felt rather frustrated about the meager psychic and financial rewards. When I talked to Dr. Maurits Dekker of Interscience Publishers about my desire to publish my own books rather than export other people's wares and about my woeful lack of preparation, professional experience, and capital, he assured me that if I wanted to publish books it was all terribly easy. I didn't need any money, he said, because unsuspecting British publishers would give me credit; I just had to pick out a few logical titles from the London *Bookseller* (which he handed to me), write to the British publishers advertising those titles, and the rest automatically would take care of itself. I followed his instructions, and the British publishers, almost to a man—apparently warmed by my naïveté—took a chance on books and credit. The first Praeger list, consisting of about a dozen books (all of them imports), appeared in the summer of 1950. The Praeger list for 1963 comprises 97 hardcover titles and 54 paperbacks, bringing the total published thus far to 814 hardcover titles and 143 paperbacks (of which 607 hardcover books and 131 paperbacks are still in print).

From the beginning, our publishing program has reflected my own background, interests and preoccupations, which to a great extent are reflections of my formative years in Vienna: the intellectual restlessness and the artistic ambience of the years of precarious peace, the not too successful experiment of democratic socialism, the comic-opera interlude of benevolent fascism, climaxed by the traumatic experience of Nazi occupation. In many ways, our publishing program has been shaped by my response to the question posed by those years—the question of how the orderly society and polity of prewar Europe could turn so swiftly into a holocaust of totalitarianism, concentration camps and death.

Another and equally important formative experience, after I had fled from Nazism, was my service in the U.S. Army, chiefly in military intelligence. Our publishing list reflects my personal interest in military theory and general principles and in a rational approach to something as fundamentally irrational and destructive as warfare. It has also been influenced strongly by my years of service with the military government in Germany, when I first encountered directly Communist political tactics and the

blindness peculiar to the psycho-pathology of the Communist *apparatchik*. The professional attitudes I developed during these periods were transferred into the world of publishing. Thus, in a sense, publishing has been a logical continuation of my work with the army.

If there is a methodology for a sound approach that ensures success in publishing—or at least in my kind of publishing—it is the application of creative imagination in utilizing and coordinating ideas, resources, people and markets. What is needed is a multi-dimensional creativity, applied both methodically on a long-range basis and, *ad hoc*, as opportunities present themselves. This may be best described as the practice of the art of the possible at every stage in the evolution from concept to product.

Obviously, the publisher as individualist ought to know what he wants to accomplish. His aims ought to be clearly defined in terms of particular titles within an over-all program that makes sense to *him*. And he must, in a sense, *live* his publishing aims. To achieve these aims, he must become something of a monster—ready to react to, devour, and digest other people's concepts and ideas, the creative energies of his own staff and of his acquaintances, sympathizers, advisers, and friends, all the while encouraging them, guiding them, stimulating them. In our own case, I search for ideas and authors not only in the United States but throughout the world, maintaining a sort of "action attitude" toward the sounds of the times, the problems, the burgeoning ideas, the tragic frustrations. For, the publisher, if he listens and observes creatively, can take some action in response to what he sees and hears. Through his books, he can react, inform, perhaps occasionally *reform*; and in a way, he may even influence the course of history. (One always hopes the influence will be constructive.)

But the creative intellect alone cannot do the job. The creativity of passion underlies, supports, gives added dimension to the conceptual framework—and, indeed, may well be the key to the publisher as individualist. Foremost is the element of ambition—the will to succeed, the drive to move from concept to reality, to carry out a plan from initial idea to finished product. Vanity and pride, it must be admitted, are propelling forces of some power, and it is a pleasant sensation to watch one's publishing house—and one's reputation—grow. But one must soberly assess these elements, keep them within bounds and prevent them from influencing important decisions; for aims, programs and standards must remain dominant. At the same time, the personal element cannot be

dismissed. Pride is important—pride of profession, pride in skill and know-how, pride of one's own and one's staff's performance; in short, the enjoyment of what one does, at least most of the time, and the willingness to invest endless hours in routine tasks to accomplish exciting ends. The good publisher must, then, be a man of passion because in most cases only a passionate devotion to one's job and purpose can serve as the dynamics to overcome the frustrations, difficulties and trials of what he is trying to do. Though all this may sound grim, frankly I usually have a hell of a lot of fun.

The creativity of intellect and passion must be tempered by the creativity of balance—the careful yet instinctive blending of intellectual and material resources within the limit of what is possible. Ideals and quality, on the one hand—yes; but what is possible is something else again, and all one can reasonably hope for is simply to do the best one can with the resources available for a particular book at a particular time. For example, you want to have a book on Soviet society by the world's greatest expert in the field, but more often than not, you can't get him—he's too busy or too expensive or under option to another publisher. But since you still believe there is a need for the book, you will probably settle for the second- or third-ranking specialist. Of course the book ought to be as good as the combined efforts of author, editor and publisher can make it, but sometimes it isn't; it is necessarily limited by time and resources. The author may have many other commitments, the editor must pace himself in terms of the overall publishing program, and the publisher, of course, must always keep a sharp eye on the proportion of time and resources devoted to one particular title, however important. Conferences with authors, substantive editing, copy editing must at all times be balanced against the total publishing schedule.

Publishing needs a lot of drive, endurance, dogged determination—but with balance, always in proper relation to the resources available. It makes no sense to sign up 200 new authors for major projects if there are not enough editors available to handle them and if the budgets of the promotion, publicity and sales departments do not permit them to do an effective job of merchandising. Creative merchandising—which involves an imaginative effort in publicizing, promoting and actual selling of a book—must take account of the absorptive capacity and the peculiar characteristics of potential markets. Book markets, though often very large, are amorphous, ill-defined and difficult to reach. Specialized pro-

fessional targets, though more easily definable, often consist of many layers of potential customers, each with a less concrete interest in the subject than the previous one. There is the added and awkward fact that many books appeal to many different audiences, and it is difficult to decide which of these should get the promotional effort. Usually there is only so much money for a given job, and it must be divided among advertising, publicity, direct mail promotion and general promotion. How much for each? In which direction? How much for image, and how much for specific books? Is the catalog more important than the full-page ad in a major newspaper? Each of these must be weighed within the context of the publisher's overall aim. How can he best convey the idea that he really cares about his books, that they are significant? In our own case, our maximum effort goes into our paperback and hard-cover catalogs, which appear two or three times a year; into certain specialized circulars addressed to a somewhat limited audience; and into an international promotion effort that reaches innumerable government offices and virtually all important libraries throughout the world. Our catalogs are the result of teamwork, with just about everybody chipping in. Copy is prepared with the utmost care and screened three or four times by senior editors and myself before final approval. The time and money involved in this effort are probably disproportionate to the catalog's effect on its audience. But we have found no other way, and perhaps it is one of the few follies and imbalanced operations that we permit ourselves.

Fortunately or unfortunately, not only is a publisher a creator of ideas and a prudent allocator of resources; he must also be a creative leader of a team, usually combining in himself the functions of both captain and coach. As coach, he must indoctrinate his team with spirit and loyalty, teach it methods and the tricks of the game, train it for endurance and for that extra burst of effort when needed. As captain, he must set the pace, lead the way, and often carry the ball himself.

What, then, is the publisher as individualist? He is a man who dreams, plans and schemes, who manages, cracks the whip, drives and pushes, who holds people by their hands, who guides, helps and imparts strength, who makes hundreds of decisions in a short compass of time, worrying about everything from weekly sales figures to a bad jacket, from the dearth of reviews for a quasi-masterpiece to the nagging absence of the chief copy editor during the ragweed season. He talks to accountants

about balance sheets, to production managers about perfect binding, to designers about 2- or 3-color jackets, and to the great men of this world about the difficulties of carrying out the nation's foreign policy. He tries to listen to the sounds of our times and, with a third ear, to the hurt feelings of a senior editor who can't get up in the morning.

Perhaps this exercise in individual creativity within the framework of a small- or medium-sized company is an anachronism in a time of bigness. To be a lone knight is just not efficient any more, even if the lone knight rides in a modern tank. I would not take any bets on how long one can retain one's independence, especially since success breeds growth, and growth breeds the need for considerable financial resources to finance further growth. Still, it is very difficult to find substitutes for the drive toward excellence and for the passion and pride in doing a job as an individual.

## *The Role of the Literary Agent*

THERE ARE many more interpretations of the function of a literary agent than there are agents themselves, and there is probably no agent who performs his function exactly like any other. This is as it should be, but there are general similarities among all reputable agents which stem from their common purpose, the knowledgeable representation of an author's work in all the available markets throughout the world.

The emphasis in this simplified statement of purpose should fall on the two phrases "knowledgeable representation" and "author's work." The most an agent can do is to help the writer find his way to becoming the kind of author his own talent will allow him to be. Along the way, the agent acts as adviser, business manager, negotiator, keeper of records, and as a shield behind whom the author can hide from dozens of petty and bothersome details. He can work no miracles. He's not likely to find a publisher for an author who would not eventually find one for himself, but he can be of immeasurable help to the talented author who is worthy of publication.

A good, modern literary agent will be equipped to represent an author in the magazine and book publishing fields in all countries of the world where copyright is respected. He will also be equipped to market performing rights of all kinds in all parts of the world, though usually in actual practice these rights are most profitably sold exclusively in the United States or, at least, to buyers who operate from here, buy world rights, and develop the many markets themselves.

The existence of motion pictures and the development of television have complicated immensely what must have once been a rather ordinary routine of negotiating and contracting for basic publication rights. With more and more possibilities arising for the use of a piece of fiction, for instance, there are many more areas where overlapping can occur in the

sale of rights. An agent must be aware of the dangers in advance, avoid overlaps, check contracts against others, protect the basic copyright at all times, and, of course, he must do his best to get the highest possible prices for his author in every case.

All subsequent, so-called subsidiary rights, in a literary property of book length, are brought into existence with the publication and copyright of that property in book form. Consequently, all subsequent contracts depend on the author's original publishing contract, and the agent, if he's doing his job, takes great care to see that his client's future rights in the work are carefully protected. It was not long ago that publishing contracts often consisted merely of a letter from publisher to author agreeing to publish the book in question.

Perhaps it's obvious, but at this point I would like to explain that the effort and care put in on a client's behalf in any negotiation is not necessarily an expression of the agent's magnanimous charitableness. Some agents are closer to their clients than others, some better than others, but all of them earn a commission based on the total earnings of their clients' work, so the more efficient, the more knowledgeable, the more careful the agent, the more money he earns.

This brings us to another fact, not so obvious but equally important. The agent is probably the only person an author comes in contact with professionally whose interests coincide with his own. He will work with magazine editors, editors of publishing houses, TV or motion-picture script writers, directors and producers, lawyers, possibly many others in related fields; but his agent is the only person whose concern is not only for the best possible financial return from all markets on a single piece of work but also for the best plan and the best steps within it, for the long haul, the author's whole career. Consequently, the agent almost always becomes a friend, someone to talk to, and when the situation and terrain call for it, to share an occasional bottle with.

It often falls to the agent to explain a situation or educate a client in an area he might not have become familiar with previously. He's sometimes forced to urge an author to say yes when he wants to say no, or equally often, to say no when the temptation is strong to agree. Agents in many instances like these are suspected by their clients of "siding" with the publisher or producer or whoever might be the other party involved. Nonsense, of course. Why should he "side" with anyone but the client whose interests are basically his own?

An agent's ability is directly proportional to the knowledge and experience he has in the fields in which he operates. It's his business, his function really, to know the general practices, ethics, methods of operation, problems and needs of a complex of industries and professions, and more than that, he must know personally hundreds of people involved in this complex, and he should know them well enough to be aware of their personal enthusiasms, their pet hates, their hobbies; well enough to know instinctively how much to ask for a property, for instance, without frightening the prospective buyer away and without causing him to grab it up like a fitful bargain hunter in Macy's basement at lunch hour. Within the publishing business and the film and television end of things as well, the agent is usually considered helpful, therefore, since he can be counted on to explain the facts of life to authors involved in whichever field it happens to be. The publisher, producer, or whoever, can be fairly sure the agent will explain that he's not the ogre he might occasionally appear to be in the eyes of an unhappy writer—unless, of course, he actually has been the ogre the rightfully unhappy author suspects.

The agent performs another important function which is helpful both to his clients and to the markets to which he sells. In the magazine and book worlds, editors are always searching for the best available writer to take on nonfiction projects, the ideas for which have originated with the editors themselves. An agent is in an ideal position to suggest possibilities and if things work out, to land a good assignment for one of his writers. The same procedure works with adaptations for screen and television plays when a producer wants to find a capable professional, familiar with the medium, to adapt a novel or short story for screen or television treatment.

Though perhaps they don't strictly come under the heading of *functions*, I would like to point out as examples two widely disparate areas in which an agent's knowledge of changes taking place and experience with current developments can be of considerable benefit to his clients.

Authors and artists of all kinds have been by all standards the group most unfairly treated by the dozens of tax bills which have been extruded by the Executive and Congressional machinery. To tax as personal income during the year in which it is earned the money made by an author's first successful novel, even though he might have written for years with little or no return, is certainly unfair. But that's how the law has been



worked out. There have been methods developed to avoid the problem, but none has been really satisfactory, and the legality of some of them is still open to question. As this is being written, the most equitable tax bill thus far, for authors anyway, is endlessly waiting its turn in Congress. If and when this bill is passed, and providing the small provision protecting authors rides out the political storm, much will have been accomplished.

The point, however, is that an agent must stay as much abreast of all the possible means of protection against unfair taxation available to his clients as he must the trends and shifts within the industries with which he's dealing.

The other area is a phase of the publishing business which has been of major concern to authors, agents, and publishers and which has been much written about and therefore brought to the attention of the interested public—the question of reprint rights: the licensing of publication rights by hardcover publishers to soft cover publishers. Proceeds from such licenses have been split traditionally in equal shares between publisher and author. So far as I know, there's no rational explanation for the 50-50 split, and because I've always felt that there should be no terms in a potential contract which are fixed ahead of time and therefore not negotiable, I've always disagreed with this particular item. Almost every agent does. To my knowledge, however, there are only a handful of contracts in New York which have departed from the traditional 50-50.

More interesting is the fact that the obstinacy of hardcover publishers toward negotiating a different split seems to be working a gradual, but important, change in the industry itself. Where a few years back there were hardcover publishers who licensed to soft cover publishers, there has been a gradual shift which has involved the establishment of soft cover lines within hardcover publishing houses, the development of the "quality paperbacks" by both kinds of publishers, and finally the establishment of hardcover lists by publishers who have previously limited themselves to soft covers and who depended in the past on hardcover publishers for their reprint licenses.

These few publishers have, in essence, gone into competition with their sources of supply. So far, at least, no one seems to have suffered, but the author now has an opportunity to receive the full royalty from reprint editions of his books when one of these houses publishes both hard- and soft cover editions. Depending on book and author, this can work either

way as far as financial return is concerned. Though the author gets the full royalty on the reprint edition, he loses the advantage of the bidding between soft cover houses which could result in a generous guarantee, half of which might be larger than the total royalty paid on the whole sale of the reprint edition. This is a relatively new development, and both agents and publishers are in the process of learning all the ramifications.

It's a complicated profession. The demands on the agent are many and diverse. He's called on to do something almost every day which, until that day, he's very likely never done before and might never do again. The job is always changing, never the same, and therein, partially, lies its appeal. The final appeal, I suppose, exists in the fact that an agent deals with individual people, their own abilities, and personal vagaries. They haven't yet invented the machine which can write a book. At least, not a good book.

# 3

## The University as Publisher

IN book publishing, one phenomenon in recent years has been the growth of publishing by universities. Today, one book in every thirteen published in the U.S. bears the imprint of a university press.

Roger Shugg, in this section, writes about the unique functions which a university press performs and about the unique relationships which exist between university presses and their authors.

Thomas J. Wilson offers an overview of American book publishing, its "hazards and opportunities." Although Mr. Wilson writes about the whole of American book publishing, he does so from a university press viewpoint—which contrasts, in several respects, with the attitude expressed by commercial publishers elsewhere in this volume.



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ROGER W. SHUGG

## *The Professors and Their Publishers*

IT IS ACCEPTED as an almost self-evident truth that scholars are devoted to books; their eyes grow dim, their shoulders bent, their minds nobly wise with much reading and writing. But we know bookmen, as publishers' representatives are called, who scoff at this image. One of them likes to while away idle hours on a campus rummaging through the library stacks to see whose names and what dates are recorded on the book charge cards. From the scattering of names he finds there and the long intervals, sometimes years, between borrowings, he cynically concludes that professors rarely read beyond the essential books of their disciplines.

He must be mistaken, of course. Since scholars surely do not talk knowingly about books they have not read, they must make use of copies drawn from their institutional libraries. For it is a demonstrable fact that they seldom buy personal copies of these tools of their trade, and they complain that too many books and journals are published to allow them to "keep up" with the literature of their subject. Reports of the long-term sales records of some of the classics in American history and similar studies of library circulation have given historians cause for shocked comment and reflection. Books on which successive generations of teachers and graduate students had learned to rely were found to have sold only one or two thousand copies.

These facts, so startling to the history professors, were no surprise to publishers. They had learned long since, from the figures in their ledgers, that scholars, whether for want of money or through disinclination, do not buy the books on which the academic enterprise depends. When a scholar-author, certain that all his fellow specialists will buy the important book he has written, estimates its probable sale by the thousands enrolled in his professional association, the experienced publisher sadly but firmly reduces the edition to a mere fraction of that number.

Nowadays this experienced publisher talking with a professor about his latest monograph is most likely to be the director or the editor of a university press. The commercial publishers have served the scholars of America long and well, especially in scientific and technical fields and in textbooks, and they still, surprisingly often, add a professor's manuscript to their list knowing it will be a financial loss, just because they like the guy, or think his work is important, or for some other reason unrelated to their balance sheet. But they cannot thus indulge themselves with any frequency and hope to remain in business. So a good many of their letters of rejection console the professor by advising him, "Your book should be published by a university press."

University publishing got its start in the United States in the last half of the nineteenth century. By that time universities were growing more numerous and much larger, and their programs were tending to emphasize graduate study and research. Specialization in scholarship was growing apace, and specialization made communication among scholars more necessary and at the same time limited the number of potential readers for each scholar's work. When commercial publishers could afford to handle fewer and fewer of the professors' books, the universities themselves were forced to assume the task and began to establish presses. Only four were organized before 1900; by 1920 twelve were in operation; by 1940 there were twenty-seven; today their number exceeds fifty.

Until little more than a decade ago the commercial publishing world held these university presses in disdain. Because their principal, for some their sole, task was to print the work of scholars for other scholars, they were scorned as publishers of "books that nobody wants to read." Even the professors viewed them askance and sought their services only as a last resort. Of necessity they issued their books in editions of a thousand copies or less and sold them slowly, usually a single copy at a time.

Nonetheless, they were performing a real and necessary service to learning, so that their size, stature, and skill grew with the years. Today they are an important and respected segment of the publishing industry. Of the 13,000 books issued by all publishers in the United States in a recent year, almost 1,000, or one in thirteen, carried the imprint of a university press. In 1961, these presses together sold some 4,000,000 books for a collective sales income of more than \$12,000,000.

This change in the role and rank of university presses was greatly accelerated in the 1940's during what was called "the crisis in publishing."

When wartime and postwar inflation sent the costs of labor and materials spiraling upward faster than book prices could follow, the commercial publisher's break-even point in size of edition climbed rapidly. Whereas he might formerly have crossed from red ink to black at a sale of 2,000 or 2,500 copies, now he was finding it necessary to sell 4,000, or 5,000, or even 10,000 copies to meet his expenses. Inevitably more and more of the books written by professors found their way onto the editorial desks of the university presses.

Those were exhilarating years for university publishers as they moved perforce into a kind and extent of activity that had not before been required of them. It was satisfying to publish some readable books that could be advertised and promoted and even sold through bookstores. It was exceedingly pleasant to watch the sales figures jump, and stimulating, if a bit startling, to deal with authors who were accustomed to be paid, not to pay, for publication. It was challenging to move toward the methods of "real" publishing.

Not all was advantage, however. The cost squeeze soon became as severe for the university presses as for the commercial houses, and the subsidies needed for this semi-trade publishing were far in excess of the amounts either individual authors or the universities could provide. Philanthropic foundations might occasionally be cajoled into granting aid for publication, but for the most part they stubbornly refused to finance the printing of reports of the research they encouraged. While neglecting to consult a publisher before making one of their generous grants in support of research, they insisted, when the project was completed and ready for publication, that if the book was any good it should pay its own way.

So, all too often, the university publishers and the university professors were left glaring at each other across their desks.

Why, pleaded the publishers in desperation, can't you professors choose subjects that more than a handful of your colleagues are interested in, and why can't you learn to write so your books will be readable? Then we could publish them without this eternal hunt for subsidies.

Why, grumbled the professors in frustration, can't you university press people learn to do your job like the men in New York? If you would just advertise my book, and get it reviewed in the *New York Times*, and make sure the bookstores had copies of it, you could sell enough to publish it without subsidy.

This mutual dissatisfaction between author and publisher, as old as publishing itself, of course, but usually restrained by the interdependence of the two parties, is aggravated when they work as near neighbors on the same campus. University publishers have been known to suggest that a press would find it far easier to handle a manuscript from any outside scholar than from a member of its own faculty.

The financial situation of the presses has improved somewhat in recent years. Here and there a university administration, aware of the costs as well as the value of scholarly publishing, is undertaking to provide adequate support for its press. For a very few presses the stringency has been eased by donations and bequests that add up to a substantial endowment. And the Ford Foundation has helped greatly by channeling some of its aid to scholars through the university presses.

Nonetheless, most of the presses still have to struggle in one way or another with the problem of insufficient funds. Sales income simply will not pay publishing costs when the edition is necessarily small, and in general, the more specialized and advanced the scholarship in a book, the smaller must be its edition.

Hopefully, the presses have looked to the libraries as their chief market, but too many of these are starved in book budget, in staff, and in space. If each of the 1,800-odd college and university libraries in the United States had money, personnel, and room enough to shelve at least one copy of every scholarly book published, the problem of the small edition would cease to plague publisher and professor alike. And the presence of such academic riches on library shelves in the smaller colleges might stimulate their faculty members to do more than repeat old lectures and their students to do more than memorize textbooks.

Yet even the suggestion is utopian—unless some foundation can be persuaded to underwrite the advancement of learning in this effective, though perhaps not spectacular, way. As matters stand, the publisher of a scholarly book can count at the start on no more than two or three hundred orders from educational libraries. For a scientific or technical book he can expect nearly an equal number of orders from libraries overseas.

It is debatable whether paperback editions have contributed much to the financial easement of the presses, but they certainly have widened the circulation of many scholarly books. The "quality" paperback lines



—those priced at a dollar or more and issued in editions of 5,000 copies upward—have brought new life and wide readership to many a forgotten classic of scholarship. Books that in their original editions sold barely a thousand copies have sold five or ten times that number when they were issued in soft covers.

This is gratifying to the publisher, of course, and also to the professor. If the book is his, he welcomes the income from royalties, often the first he has been paid, and he is pleased by the increased currency of his work. But even if he is not the author, as a teacher he is happy to be freed from dependence on a single textbook. Without putting undue financial strain on his students, he can require of them a kind and range of reading that would have been unthinkable before the “paperback revolution.” Sometimes, rather to the professor’s chagrin, not only his own books but his favorite source and reference books, and those from which he draws his lectures, are now readily available to his students.

It is not paper covers, of course, but large editions and quantity distribution that permit the reduced prices at which paperback lines are sold. Unfortunately, not every scholarly book warrants reprinting in so large an edition, another hard publishing fact that professors find it difficult to understand. Most of the university press paperback editions have been limited to reprints, where the major publication costs have already been met and the sales potential tested in a hardcover, higher-priced edition. It remains to be seen whether original publication of scholarly books in paperback will often enough return the publisher’s expenses and repay the author for his labor.

In their search for funds, most of the university presses have at some times and to some degree entered the commercial competition for income-producing books. Frankly and boldly, they have accepted and announced the fact that only by publishing some books that make money can they continue to publish the scholarly books that are bound to lose money. So far none of them has published fiction, bar an odd novel or two, and only two or three, for special or historical reasons, publish textbooks other than those for advanced or experimental courses, which, initially at least, are “non-commercial” items.

What the university publishers, like most of their commercial colleagues, have always been eager to find is sound, well-written, non-technical interpretations of scholarship presented for the enlightenment of

serious readers. But in pursuit of such books the publishers encounter high hurdles set up by academic mores and by developing trends in scholarship.

It is a truism among publishers everywhere that most American scholars cannot write. Not only do they lack grace and wit and a lucid style; they do not know how to captivate and inform readers outside their classrooms. Making a virtue of their own necessity, perhaps, they view with suspicion the rare professor who *can* write and they frown upon all writing purged of jargon and the academic apparatus of footnotes and bibliography as superficial popularization.

For centuries the ideal product of the cultivated scholar was a work of wisdom or learning set forth in polished prose, a book that could delight while it informed its readers. But this literary tradition has lost much of its prestige and influence in American scholarship. Not a few professors are so preoccupied with the sheer mechanics of their research that they produce, instead of good books, wearisome research reports: prospective, preliminary, interim, and conclusive. These are too often gracelessly written in the jargon of their subjects, wastefully full of repetition, intolerably dull if not wholly unintelligible to anyone not in the inner circle of initiates. Even the humanists have made a cult of obscurity and carry their *explication de texte* so absurdly far that all but captive readers are lost through boredom early on the way.

Why? Why this deliberate divorcement of the scholar from the public? Is it a consequence of the attempt in other disciplines to ape the methods of the natural and physical sciences? We have sometimes thought so as we watched the social sciences turn into the behavioral sciences and surrender to the quantitative method. Humanists have been less successful, but not always for want of trying, in accommodating themselves and their studies to the alien "scientific" and statistical mold. Even history, we are told, is joining the stampede toward research by slide rule and electronic computer. What strange kind of book will come out of this new fashion in research?

Good books in any traditional sense can hardly be expected from a machinery of research that is highly organized, intensely competitive, and exorbitantly expensive, producing, as it often does, investigations of "small groups" by large groups in what is called team-research. To some extent, of course, the scholarly book has always been written, not as an end in itself, but for academic preferment and the monetary rewards that

go with it. The scholar follows fashions in research; so it is no wonder today that the professor who devotes a lifetime to pursuing his own reading and writing has become old-fashioned, solitary and lost in the scramble for research funds.

"Get grants or perish" is replacing that old bane of the quadrangles, "Publish or perish." And publishers do not welcome the probable effects of the new imperative any more than they liked the pressures generated by the old one. Nor, we suspect, do most of the professors, to whom the ways of the promoter are still alien. But this may not remain true of the younger academic generation, many of whom seem to us more concerned about the economics of their reputation than about their scholarship.

We are aware that these expressions of our prejudices and viewings-with-alarm will merely confirm some professors in their criticisms of university publishers. These gentlemen, say their critics, forget their proper place and set themselves up as arbiters of scholarship when they do not understand or appreciate it and have no competence to judge it. They appraise a manuscript according to the neatness of its structure, the niceties of its phrasing, and the dramatic effectiveness of its form, not by the usefulness of its contents for scholars. They want to publish only a "book," a finished and conclusive piece of work, although the inconclusive report of experimental findings or of assembled data may make a far greater contribution to scholarship. They accept or reject a manuscript according to the size of the market for it in book form and keep urging or imposing editorial revisions "to widen the market," although the work most vital to the advance of knowledge in any field is likely to be esoteric and cannot be simplified without damage and distortion.

There is undoubtedly considerable truth in these charges. Not many university publishers, surely, attempt to evaluate scholarly manuscripts for themselves without advice from specialist readers, but they do tend to become biased against the esoteric manuscript, not only because of the financial problem it presents, but also because it gives them so little chance to exercise their publishing skills and to feel their pride of craft. They do not relish the role of passive liaison agent between author and printer.

Nonetheless, most university publishers are responsible members of the academic community and serve the cause of scholarship in basic and crucial ways. They are constantly on guard, for instance, against any encroachment upon the scholars' freedom to publish, and they have often fought hard, harder than the professors themselves sometimes, to preserve

the scholarly integrity of their books and lists, against administrative officials who cynically sought to use the university press as a tool of the public relations and development offices.

It is time that the professors and their publishers drew closer together in mutual understanding of each other's ways, needs, and problems. The publishers must keep reminding themselves that university presses exist, basically, to further and facilitate communication among scholars, and the professors must recognize that this is an expensive task which cannot be performed without subventions from some source. Both groups must learn to discriminate between the work of truly esoteric scholarship, which cannot advantageously be made intelligible to more than a relatively few readers, and the work of broader potential, which warrants revision or restatement to increase its circulation.

Progress toward such productive harmony would be accelerated if scholars gave more time and attention to improving their skills as authors, and if publishers made academic competence one of the professional requirements for press employment. University publishing has benefited immeasurably from recruiting for its ranks an increasing number of persons trained in commercial publishing, but it has not always made sure that these recruits possessed or acquired the sympathetic understanding of scholars and scholarship that is essential to a proper performance of its task. Graduate studies in different disciplines might well be required of press-staff members, especially editors, with time off and tuition paid for them if necessary, to make them specialists, not in any one subject, but in the aims and hopes and habits of the academic genus. With such training made a part of their professionalization, they could be expected to deal more intelligently, effectively, and pleasurably with the manuscripts of their scholar-authors.

This suggestion is utopian as matters stand today because of its prohibitive cost. But fantasy is not always futile. What else might university presses do if they had the will and the means to do it? Would they publish any manuscript submitted to them by a faculty author? No. True service to scholarship surely demands that some editorial winnowing take place, so that a university's imprint on a book constitutes a reasonable guarantee that its contents will be fresh, readable, and authoritative, and worth a hard-pressed reader's time and money.

Would they publish all doctoral dissertations, unrevised and unedited? No. Perhaps, as some examining professors insist, all such theses *should*

be publishable, but in fact few of them are. Many even of the good ones warrant no more than an article or two in a professional journal, and to put them between book covers would be social waste. But university publishers cheat themselves as well as the oncoming generation if they refuse to consider any doctoral thesis. First books by promising young scholars belong on university press lists; they can be exciting and rewarding discoveries—and without these first books, where are we to look for second and third books that may be even better?

Would the presses publish all important and original scholarship without regard to its limited readership? Yes, of course, and without carping about lavish illustration or difficult and expensive typesetting, provided only that two or three of the author's fellow specialists could agree on the merit of his work. Professor-critics of the publishers accuse them of being unable to recognize a challenging piece of scholarship when it comes their way, but at least as often it is other scholars who thus fail in recognition, whether through conservative timidity, adherence to a differing professional faction, or a pedantic lack of imagination.

Given sufficient funds, the university presses would not only publish, they would encourage and aid scholars to produce the reference works and finding lists that can so greatly ease and shorten the labors of research: bibliographies, archival indexes, subject dictionaries and encyclopedias, concordances, guides to "museums without walls." They might even, in view of the pronounced emphasis on Mass Marketing and the resulting dilution toward mass culture in existing English-language encyclopedias, venture collectively upon the preparation and production of more specialized encyclopedias that would be worthy of contemporary scholarship in the English-speaking world.

The presses would gladly, if they could, enter upon extensive programs of publishing annotated editions, edited texts, collections of papers, works, and documents, reprints of ancient treatises and unread classics major and minor—to the end of making available in print the whole corpus of scholarly literature, not only in the more populous humanities and social sciences but in such deprived fields as musicology and the history of the natural and physical sciences. It would be a pleasure as well as a service to fill in the unknown valleys between the familiar peaks of great names for oncoming generations of scholars in every discipline.

As an additional service of importance, the publishers would welcome the possibility of arranging for the translation and publication in English

of major works of scholarship issued in foreign languages. Such translation is the more necessary because it can no longer be assumed that American scholars will always read essential works even in French and German, let alone in Slavic or oriental languages; because commercial publishers are increasingly interested only in the better selling items of foreign fiction and nonfiction; and because, English having become the *lingua franca* of today, it is imperative that all significant scholarship be available in English if it is to be read by scholars of all tongues.

University presses would like, too, to offer publication in shorter and newer forms. The mature and experienced scholar can often make an outstanding contribution to his field or to the enlightenment of educated laymen in an essay or a lecture, but the economics of publishing now deny him independent publication of such short pieces. He must either pad what he has to say to fill a minimum of one hundred pages or be content with periodical publication or inclusion in an anthology of essays. Given money enough to cover the inevitable deficits, university publishers would eagerly encourage his brevity by publication in the traditional form of pamphlets. They would also try to help the learned journals, and even welcome the privilege of publishing them, a difficult and deficit-producing enterprise which they have traditionally avoided wherever possible. They would even try to compensate for their comparative neglect of the physical and natural sciences over the years by providing scientists with speedy communication via microforms and tape recordings.

It becomes obvious that to establish any such visionary programs would require more than increased financial resources. It would demand wholehearted devotion and cooperation from the professors, and from the publishers a lessening of their commercial spirit, a true dedication to intellectual ends, a genuine pleasure in serving the learned world. Both professor and publisher would have to heed the advice recently given them by a university president and learn to look to Athens, not to Madison Avenue, for their impulse and ideal.

THOMAS J. WILSON

## *American Book Publishing: Hazards and Opportunities*

THREE ASPECTS of American book publishing are extraordinarily important today—important naturally to the American student and reader of books, but also to the American economy and most of all, perhaps, to the position of the United States in the world of the 1960's. These three aspects are the merger, the paperback, and the rate of distribution of American books abroad. In what I have to say about these three important factors in my profession, I shall be brief and somewhat pessimistic about the first two, the merger and the paperback, and I hope, despite brevity, to be able to probe beneath their surfaces to indicate facets not generally known, dangers not generally recognized. I shall treat the American book abroad at greater length, for I think this is a matter less familiar than the other two to those who will read me; and the net result of what I say will, I believe, be more encouraging if it must at the same time be critical.

Since World War II, and even in the 'thirties, paperback publishing has been first the exciting, then the possibly decisive, and finally what appears to be the dominant element in book publishing in this country. Within the last very few years an old, but in effect a new, factor, much more influential than it was at any point in the nineteenth or the first half of the twentieth century, has appeared. That is the merger. It has had and will have an enormous influence on both paperback publishing and the whole course of the book industry. Without great research or recourse to the printed records of publishing, but on the basis of considerable reading and knowledge acquired otherwise, I think it is clear that before World War II the general trend in American book publishing was toward the diversification of imprints, and toward the multiplicity of editorial policies and of ideas regarding the sale and promotion of

books. True, the book clubs had made an impressive start in the 'twenties, with consequent pressure toward uniformity of idea and policy; the really wise man might have taken this beginning as an omen of what was to come. Equally true, Robert De Graff, Freeman Lewis, and other pioneers had begun in the 'thirties to publish paperback reprints at very low cost, quite possibly as a development of the experiment Albert and Charles Boni, Farrar and Rinehart, and others made in the very late 'twenties with original books, mostly fiction, published in paper covers at about a dollar retail. But book clubs were not as numerous as they are now and they did not have the tremendous selective effect on what Americans read. Paperback publishing before Pearl Harbor Day was an interesting but by no means an overly significant factor in book publishing.

After World War II, both the book clubs and the paperback publishers increased in volume of business and in influence at a rate that threatened the ordinary course of clothbound original publishing. The merger of independent book houses under one umbrella or within one pair of handcuffs is, in my opinion, a result of and an answer to these developments. Before 1941 there were of course a number of instances in which one book publisher bought another, or two or three joined together; these combinations, generally without importance, were greatly outnumbered by the cases of editors and salesmen who broke off from their original houses to establish new imprints and to put into effect new conceptions of the ideal of what book publishing should be in the United States. Up to 1941 I remember only one combination of houses of great importance, only one case in which a merger (not then so-called, I believe) affected to a significant degree the course of publishing and the distribution of power among American book publishers. This was the acquisition of the Century Company by Appleton's, a deal made with all due deference to the bought firm by the buyer, an arrangement in which few feelings and few purses were hurt, which resulted, nevertheless, in the creation of a single entity of greater weight than had been possessed by the two merging corporations when they were separate. Aside from the Appleton-Century joining of giants, the overriding tendency was in the other direction: new houses sprang off from old, prospered, or died—and when they died, they frequently came back to life again under a new name.

In the last fifteen years, the trend has been in the other direction. Of course, one has merely to look at an issue of *Publishers' Weekly* to find new imprints one has never heard of. Some of these new houses prosper,



endure, and become, as far as one can judge, potentially long-lived; but so often have the outstanding new houses been bought by bigger publishers that one might think the primary reason for a bright young man to establish his own house was to sell it, a few years later, at a profit to a better-established company. However, this swallowing up of young and active fish by old sharks has been the less important of two sides of the process of merging in book publishing. Meridian has been acquired by the World Publishing Company of Cleveland; Interscience Publishers is now a part of the empire of John Wiley and Sons; and the Free Press of Glencoe, Illinois, is owned by Macmillan. Far more important are the separation of Macmillan of New York from its London parent and its own purchase within a few years by Crowell-Collier, with what appears to be a complete loss of the original Macmillan identity. Appleton-Century itself (with the college textbook house of Crofts) has been bought by Meredith, the publisher of *Better Homes and Gardens*. Similar mergers, so-called, have been effected across the board: Henry Holt and Company has absorbed the outstanding trade and college textbook publisher, Rinehart, and the strong juvenile, textbook, and Bible house of Winston; Bobbs-Merrill has disappeared into the maw of Howard W. Sams and Company; Harcourt-Brace has purchased the textbook and test house, World Book Company (not to be confused with World Publishing Company mentioned earlier); Pantheon, one of the most interesting of all the small trade houses in New York, has had to lose itself in Random House because of accidents of age and personality, unavoidable or unforeseen; Harper and Brothers, in order to broaden its base, has acquired Row, Peterson and Company and has bastardized the most distinguished imprint in American publishing by changing its own name to Harper and Row; and the most exciting personality in American book publishing, the individual who has done most in the last forty years to make taste in content and design of books a matter of economic as well as cultural importance, Alfred A. Knopf, is now also merged into Random House, with an apparently resultant loss of control of everything except what are euphemistically called the books in which he is personally interested.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that these mergers are a natural result of the whole trend in contemporary American industry, that they correspond to developments in any number of other lines of business, I will neither deny nor elaborate; the fact is clear. Mergers come from the need to increase capital, to decrease overhead costs, to eliminate unprofitable items, to concentrate on

profitable ones, and thus to increase profits—an eminently desirable end result, economically. Wall Street, seeing the possibilities of the book business, has become interested, has provided much of the needed capital, and has guided many of the mergers. But despite the naturalness of the process, the results, *qua* books, worry me and should worry the American reader. Book publishing in the United States has never been until recently a big money-maker; but it has been from the early nineteenth century until lately so individual and diversified that all points of view stood a chance of expression, so varied editorially that radically experimental authors, provided they were technically proficient, could expect to be published. In spite of denials from those who have merged and those who control the mergers, I fear that uniformity—conformity to the median of popular taste—will be the most likely result of this swallowing of small or large houses by larger ones; I fear that fewer nuts and screwballs will see their works in print, to the loss of our descendants; I fear that the rainbow of subject and method in the writing of books may gradually deteriorate to a dull gray. The danger would be serious enough, were we dealing with the form of book traditional in our publishing—the book well-printed on good paper and bound in cloth. That is no longer the case, unfortunately as well as fortunately. We now have everywhere an overwhelming preponderance of low-priced paperbound books, and I fear that the narrowing of editorial range and the decrease in the number of strong publishing policies and principles, which are the almost necessary result of the mergers I have mentioned, will have a severe and unfortunate effect on what happens to books of all kinds, including paperbacks—and there were dangers enough, peripherally and even basically, without those brought into the equation by mergers.

In what I say now I do not wish to be taken as an enemy of paperback publishing. The contrary is true. Being a publisher of hardbound books, I am pleased by the steadily increasing advances and guarantees of royalties that paperback publishers are anxious to give for the right to reprint. Many Harvard University Press books now in paperback would have long been out of print and many more would soon be, for lack of demand at clothbound prices. More and more old-line houses have added paperback departments, and so have many university presses, large and small. In the minds of these entrepreneurs there appears to be no limit to the size of the paperback market, no natural restriction on the number of new titles that can be absorbed by that market, and thus no reason to

stay out of it. The unavoidable result is a staggering increase in the competition for paperback rights to the original books issued by publishers who do not have paper lines. Two years ago the average advance guarantee for the right to issue a paperback edition of a Harvard University Press book was \$500. Today it is nearer \$2,000, and it shows every sign of rising higher.

All this is fine, of course, for the few publishers who are selling—not buying, particularly since the number grows smaller every month or so and we thus become more and more courted. Of all the leading university presses, there are only half a dozen or so which lack paperback departments or paperback lines, and I can think of no outstanding commercial house which does not have or is not planning to launch a line of paperbound books.

What is wrong with this wonderful picture of a world in which more and more books are becoming available at lower costs, so that every grammar school and high school student in the United States, every interested adult, can buy, read, own the great works, and those less great, that interest him? The first thing wrong is suggested by the fact that at least 95 percent of these inexpensive books are reprints of works originally issued in cloth at much higher prices. No way has yet been found to make original publishing at paperbound prices feasible in this country. A continuing supply of clothbound originals is thus necessary for paperback publishers to draw upon. But as the costs of labor and materials rise in the book business, the break-even point of the sales of a clothbound book rises too, and very sharply, and so does the retail price. Though paperback publishers tell themselves that their editions reach a different market from that of the originally published work, I am not sure this is true—or if it is now true, I certainly do not know how long it will remain so. The publisher of clothbound books used to hope to see the size of his market increase by the addition of the youngsters who grow up to be book readers and the older people who find out late in life that books are fun to read. How many of these new book readers can be counted on to buy a new clothbound novel at \$4.95 or more when there are dozens available in paper covers in the same shop at prices of \$.75 to \$1.25 and when the expensive novel he is looking at will probably appear in paper covers within a year or two? How many purchasers among new book readers will the serious work in economics, politics, history, or the fine arts, selling at \$7.50 or more, find when these same subjects are treated

in books only a year or two older, a year or two less up-to-date, written by authors at least as well-known, at prices of \$1.25 to \$1.95? The handicap of the original new book becomes even more serious when a person analyzing the book business takes a look at the inside of a bookshop and realizes how paperback lines are gradually squeezing hardbound books out of shelf and display space.

What is going to happen? I think of quite a few probabilities, many certainly bad, some potentially but not surely good. As retail prices and break-even points of sales rise, and display space for expensive books decreases, the market for clothbound books will probably become static or actually decline in size; and the publisher of original books will come more and more to select the works he publishes, *not* by the criteria he used to follow, but by his judgment of what he can make out of a title in its second life as a paperback. This trend is already clearly visible. If a work is obviously unlikely to have a paperback sale, its chances of being published as a clothbound book will become less and less. The new author, the experimental, unconventional one, has a tough enough time now to find a publisher; his chances will be far poorer if this prediction for the clothbound market becomes a fact, and we shall have what amounts to birth control of a most unfortunate sort in the book field. In the area of the scholarly book, the effects are likely to be even more drastic than elsewhere, with a resultant larger dependence on institutional subsidies and a steadily growing reluctance on the part of administrators and trustees to help faculty members publish the findings of their research.

Another probability is that competition among the paperback houses themselves will become stiffer. The big ones will eliminate or swallow the smaller, perhaps principally by the device of depriving them of display space through the offer to bookstores of higher discounts and more favorable trade practices than the small man can match or by actually buying display space in the bookstore. This, too, is already beginning to happen. Another device that is being used to drive the little boys out of the paperback field is that of making unrealistic advances or guarantees to create virtual monopolies at the sources of supply. One enormous house, with a new but tremendous paper series, has made no effort to hide its intentions to act along these lines, sometimes with ludicrous results. For instance, that firm bought a good but very serious and difficult out-of-print work from Harvard University Press at a ridiculous guarantee. It is an axiom in the paperback business that a work must sell fast or go out of

print, to be replaced by something that *will* sell fast. At the end of the first year of sale of this work as a paperback, the royalties earned by the sale of the paperback edition amounted to less than a seventh of the advance paid to Harvard Press before its publication. The house in question can stand losses such as this book will certainly cause, but the small ones cannot. And if the small houses are eliminated, paperback offerings will have no such variety or excitement as the shelves in the bookshops now show. In other words, birth control again, of a different but equally undesirable sort.

A probability of a happier kind exists, too. I stated earlier that no method had yet been found to make original publishing in paper covers at paperback prices surely profitable and thus feasible. This may not always be the case; some ingenious soul may find a way to increase the profit margin on paperback books and thus to justify the additional overhead costs and the additional gambles that would be the result of publishing original books regularly as paperbacks. When and if this happens, and if paperback editors are then sufficiently adventurous and public-spirited to be willing to take risks on the new and the unconventional, I see the possibility of this side of the publishing industry repairing much of the damage it will otherwise have done to original writing, creative, critical, or scholarly, by some of its other manifestations suggested earlier. I fear that the paperback book industry eventually, indeed within a fairly brief span, is likely to kill the finest elements in original book publishing in this country—the goose that now lays golden eggs for it; but if the publishing of paperback originals ever becomes feasible on a broad scale and if it is done responsibly and imaginatively, another such goose and an even more richly productive one may be born.

American paperback books are a new and potent element in a process that has been going on for a long, long time—the selling of American books to foreign countries. In the period before World War II the foreign distribution of American books in the English language, not only in Europe but also in what are now called the developing areas, was largely carried on by Henry M. Snyder, with the assistance of his partner William S. Hall. They did a good job for their time. Today their companies and their methods have been largely superseded. The market for American books (particularly the most serious works in the natural and social sciences) in Europe and the darker continents has increased enormously, and the individual efforts and leisurely tempo of our prewar foreign book

trade have been replaced, not always happily or pleasantly, by much larger and more carefully planned enterprises.

Two young men whom Harry Snyder trained, Paul Feffer and Calvert Simons, have established a concern many times larger than Snyder's, which covers the world with a small army of salesmen and consultants, even locally established publishers and distributors. Feffer and Simons represent many dozens, perhaps hundreds, of American book publishers.<sup>2</sup> Groups of other publishers have banded together into consortiums that enable them, they believe, to cover almost all countries with somewhat more attention to individual books than Feffer and Simons presumably can provide. And the giants of the American publishing world, McGraw-Hill, Prentice-Hall, Doubleday, John Wiley and Sons, Crowell-Collier, and others of great size are either establishing their own individual offices in India, Japan, Argentina, and West Africa or are building up specialized staffs for foreign trade in their home offices and sending their men out for long selling trips to sections of the globe far beyond the reach of the American book a generation ago. Accurate figures for prewar foreign sales are difficult to obtain, but it is safe to say that sales of books manufactured in the United States in all foreign countries (including Canada and the British Isles) did not amount to more than 2 percent of the total and may well have been closer to 1 percent; whereas today, when total American book sales are many times more than in the 'twenties and 'thirties, the general ratio is somewhere between 8 and 10 percent, and the foreign sales of serious books, such as those of university presses and the great technical houses, are at least twice the general average. One publisher, Princeton University Press, sells annually from 23 to 30 percent of all its books in foreign markets.

The drive for education has greatly increased the foreign demand for *American* books in the English language. The defeat of Germany in two world wars; the departure from Germany of many of its greatest educational leaders; the decline of French prestige around the world during a critical period of the development of which I am speaking; the lack of currency of the Russian language and the diffidence of the Russians about their language; the general good taste left in the mouths of ex-colonials by the British when they departed; and, concurrently, the tacit or sometimes explicit realization of the people of the new countries that the United States is not only the more powerful of the two great English-speaking nations but also the one that is taking the intellectual lead—

these are some of the reasons for the establishment of English as the almost universal second language of the peoples of the world, and some of the reasons why the demand for books of American origin has grown so sensationally in Europe, but even more among the new and emerging nations—whether they are former members of the British Empire or dependencies cut loose from other colonial empires that are dead or past their prime. For there can be no doubt at all that English has now become the world's second language: the well-educated older people in Argentina, Japan, Egypt, and Iran may speak French or sometimes German as their second tongue; but the children are learning and the educated young people have learned English, they want to read books in English, and they regard English as the common speech of the future. This emergence of English as the second language of the new world, no matter what the first language may happen to be, complements the drive for education, and it is the second big reason for what is happening to American books abroad.

All this has nothing to do with politics; it is simply a matter of communication. I have never been in mainland China, but I would wager that there, as in neutralist Indonesia, Burma, and Egypt, pro-Western Turkey and Iran, English is the foreign language most generally taught and most avidly studied. Even the Russians, when they export (to Tehran, to Delhi and Calcutta, to Djakarta and Surabaya), sell books in English (classics, texts, children's books, and political tracts) in order to prove to the local populations that they, the Russians, can give the new nations what the latter need and want more effectively than can the Americans and English who speak the language. This particular phase of Russian activity, incidentally, worries me less now than it did in 1957 when I first traveled to the east of the Mediterranean and to the west of the Solomon Islands. In 1961 the impact of this special kind of piracy or plagiarism appeared to me to have decreased considerably because of countervailing actions we ourselves, and the British to a less extent, have been taking in recent years, as well as because of a growing sophistication among the peoples subjected to the Russian effort.

Government programs have of course been outstanding among the agencies for distributing American books in the other continents of the world. In the first years after World War II the emphasis was on Europe; the effort was to spread American books in English through Europe, with the help of American government funds. As the European countries regained or increased their economic prosperity, and as the Western

Alliance developed, the need for artificial stimulation of the distribution of our books in Europe decreased, at least (and I think correctly) in the minds of the people in Washington. New nations were developing on two continents, and the countries of a third region (Latin America) were hungry for education and were demanding aid and attention from the United States comparable in scale to what we were giving elsewhere.

The countries of the Middle East and South Asia were the first successors to European nations in the eyes of the American government: not only in plows, medicines, and weaponry, but also in books. I shall not go into details of the United States Information Agency and the International Cooperation Administration (later the Agency for International Development) book programs—or into the fine points of the use of Information Media Guarantee money and Public Law 480 counterpart funds for books; nor shall I attempt to analyze what they accomplished or failed to accomplish in the way of distributing books in English from Cairo to Hong Kong. I shall simply say that more has been done than might have been done—and far less than could have been hoped in view of the money spent. The accomplishments are real. They have brought and will continue to bring honest dividends in the form of improved education and technology where these were sorely needed, and in the genuine appreciation and affection of quiet and thoughtful people who recognize generosity even when it is disguised or assailed as an instrument of propaganda and power politics. The failures—and there have been failures—have been due in part to the carelessness and bad training of United States employees who have lacked the sympathy, the understanding, and the energy necessary to understand local situations and to deal with them on the basis of common sense and good faith. In at least as large a part, these failures have been due to a point of view prevalent in Washington for a decade and still far too prevalent: the determination to preach *explicitly* the American point of view, no matter how crassly; to convert rather than to help; to propagandize rather than to educate. Perhaps because I am better informed about the book programs of our government than I am about its other endeavors, I honestly believe that there has been relatively more stupidity, more useless expenditure of money in the distribution of worthless books and valuable printing paper, than in any of the programs celebrated in “The Ugly American.” And yet I am sure, too, that despite this unforgivable waste there has been much more gain than



loss in the work our government has done with American books in the Near and Far East.

To cooperate with, to supplement, and to follow the United States government in the distribution of American books in this enormous territory have come the great entrepreneurs of American publishing, as well as the smaller publishers who have concentrated on the dissemination of American scholarship at its higher levels. It is quite possibly true that the American university presses have done proportionately more than have the large commercial houses in this particular field. However, the large American textbook houses, particularly those with strong lists in technology and the social sciences, have within the past six or seven years shown increasing awareness and ingenuity, plus real public spirit, in their efforts to bring American teaching tools within the reach of the Asian masses. Several of the larger have established branches or partnerships in Tokyo, where American textbooks in English are printed by offset and bound in paper covers; from there they are shipped in bulk at retail prices of about one-third or less of the American figure down the coasts of East Asia and throughout the Indies. The same houses and others are now creating similar arrangements for the manufacture of their books in Bombay, Calcutta, and Delhi, and for their distribution through the Indian subcontinent and the rest of South Asia. The identical process is about to begin in the Middle and Near East (Cairo, Beirut, Algiers). Only a war will stop it, and it may well be a powerful instrument to prevent that war.

For both the United States government and American private enterprise, Africa succeeded Asia as a focus of effort in books as in other exportable goods and services. But largely because of political events and complexities, and also in good part as a result of the smaller populations found from Cairo to the Cape in comparison with those from Cairo to Tokyo, the work with American books in Africa (public or private work) has never matched in intensity or accomplishment, except in Egypt, the effort or the achievement in Asia Minor and South Asia. The real job remains to be begun in Africa, as it is still to be completed in Asia.

The demands of our nearer neighbors in Latin America have clearly had their part in cutting off, short of real achievement, what might have been done in Africa if Africa had been more easily analyzed and dealt with politically. African programs for books as for other commodities,

laid out on the drafting boards of government and private enterprise, and frustrated by events, have, for the moment at least, been quite widely superseded by the *Alianza para el Progreso*—and all United States eyes have begun to turn south when book exports and the uses of the printed word in foreign affairs are discussed. The big push toward Mexico and the Caribbean, toward Central and South America, is on, as anyone knows who reads the papers. But this is a very different situation and a different problem: the intellectual elite and the ambitious classes below them do not always want English-language books, are not convinced, as are their Asian and African counterparts, of the necessity of English as a second language; the Latin American publishing industry is relatively highly developed; hundreds, even thousands, of serious United States books are already translated into Spanish and Portuguese for use in the countries to our south. But the politics, the economics, and the sociology of Latin America are not as stable as the book industry; United States books presently in English or in translation are not sold and used as they might be in Asia or Africa, given the same physical availability. There are good reasons—among them, the severe economic stratification in Latin America and the natural tendency of a neighbor to fear and resent the much stronger and richer man next door. The net result of this somewhat peculiar situation is that our government and our private book industry are at odds, not only with each other, but also in each of the two sectors, as to the right way to make our books serve a useful, educational, and peace-promoting function south of the Rio Grande.

The creation of the Agency for International Development to replace the old and inadequate International Cooperation Administration was greeted enthusiastically in Washington and over the country, for the principles on which it was established appeared to promise a new and less doctrinaire approach in which private publishing could cooperate effectively and on a greatly increased scale everywhere, but especially in Latin America. Books were for once officially recognized as having genuine weight and importance. Yet more than a year has passed with little real accomplishment in the book field by AID; and in Latin America the United States book industry has, necessarily or not, too often waited for government leadership that has not appeared. AID, despite hopes generally held for it, has put forward nothing of more than slight impact in the way of book programs; in fact, the far less wealthy USIA, theoretically devoted to propaganda rather than development, has shown itself more imaginative

and understanding in its recent Latin American efforts than has its new and giant allied agency. The most hopeful augury for future cooperation in distributing American books in Latin America and elsewhere is the very recent creation of a high-level advisory committee from the publishing industry to help the government with its book programs, first in Latin America, next in Africa, and presumably finally in Asia, where most has been accomplished to date.

Up to this point, I have been concerned almost wholly with American books in English and their distribution abroad. Translation, too, is important, but I shall not discuss it in detail. Two or three developments should be mentioned, however. Though the government's main effort has been directed toward distributing books in English to the people of the developing countries, there have nevertheless been a number of important government programs for translation into Asian languages. The USIA has done more here than any other department or agency; ICA, I think, would come next. But the efforts of the USIA have always, often wrongly, been tarred with a suspicion of propaganda, and those of ICA were limited to, *ad hoc*, so-called "program-connected" books. There has been little breadth in these government translation programs, in comparison with the wide range of books exported in English. American private publishers have been slow in most areas to show that they can adapt to the need for allowing translations into the languages of the developing countries on the basis of fees which have appeared insignificant. Among all book publishers, I fear, there has been a hesitation to permit the printing of 2,000 copies of a book in Urdu or Bengali, when the royalty on those 2,000 copies would not exceed the profit to be derived from a sale of 50 to 100 copies in English at wholesale.

The best work in this entire field of the translation of the serious American book into non-European languages has been done by Franklin Publications, a nonprofit organization established for this specific purpose, with which I am fortunate enough to be associated. Franklin is supported by foundations, most notably the Ford Foundation; the United States Government and other governments; and individuals both American and foreign. Limited geographically at present to the Middle East and Southeast Asia, it has done a tremendously effective job on very small funds. By its principle of a local choice of books under wholly local management, it has gained the confidence of its public wherever it exists, it has translated almost 2,000 books into more exotic languages than can be named here,

and it has contributed remarkably to the development of local book industries—thus gradually working itself out of its job, which is its objective. Franklin has worked successfully with American publishers and foundations, and with the United States and foreign governments. More than 25,000,000 copies of American books in translation or adaptation have been sold through Franklin's efforts. The possibility that Franklin Publications may expand into Africa and Latin America as well as into other parts of Asia is one of the brightest elements in the present situation of American books in the developing countries.

To sum up this final part of my paper: American books in English, and to a less extent in translation, are today far more widely distributed throughout the world than was the case before World War II. The increase is both absolute and relative, and it is remarkable either way. For the future, I hesitate to speak. The publishers of this country are more aware than ever before of their responsibilities as well as their opportunities outside North America and Europe. The United States government, at least to some extent, is also awake to the fact that economically as well as culturally the printed word is an effective tool. Our books are more than ever not only needed, but consciously wanted. What is required is a congruence of effort, a clarification of objectives and procedures—by private enterprises, educational institutions, foundations, and government—if the development is to be continued, not canceled.

#### REFERENCES

1. I have been informed by Mr. Knopf that he and Mrs. Knopf retain complete *editorial* control.
2. Since this article was first published, Feffer & Simons, Inc., has been bought by Doubleday & Co., an event that has caused some excitement and concern among other and smaller houses represented by F & S abroad.

# 4

## The Reader and the Book: Areas of Contact

HOPEFULLY, every book finds a reader. But the process is not easy, nor is it always successful. This section is concerned with the points of contact between book and reader: among them, the bookstore, the drug store, the newsstand, the public library.

Leonard Shatzkin, the first author in this section, feels that the process of bringing book and reader together would be simplified considerably if the publishers themselves became a little less "bookish" and a little more concerned with strengthening and reforming their own distribution methods.

Next are two views of bookstores: an outsider's (customer's) view by Edward Shills and an insider's (bookseller's) view by Theodore Wilentz. The contrasts between the two are striking, almost as though customer and bookseller had not, in this particular case, ever met.

Finally in this section, Emerson Greenaway discusses the public library—what it is and what it can become for the American reading public. Further development of public libraries, Mr. Greenaway indicates, depends heavily on Federal financial aid.



LEONARD SHATZKIN

## *The Book in Search of a Reader*

"AT THIS POINT—usually the binder's warehouse—the publisher has books; at that point is the bookbuyer. Between these two points is the tragedy of the book business." That is how O. H. Cheney\* characterized the distribution of books. That was in 1931. Much has happened since. In other industries, changes in distribution methods have wrought revolutionary miracles. In book publishing, clubs, direct-mail selling, and most important, paperback reprints have blossomed to bring some books to Mr. Cheney's bookbuyer, but in its essentials book distribution in general trade-book publishing has not changed significantly. It will change. Not only in distribution, but in many other aspects, including the mix of hard and paper binding, general publishing is at the threshold of radical change, but today Mr. Cheney would find little in his 1931 study that required updating.

Mr. Cheney may have overdramatized, but an eager bookbuyer may be excused for feeling that our distribution methods are not so much a means of getting the book to him as preventing him from getting his hands on it. Outside certain limited sections in a few important cities, it is nearly impossible to find a bookstore—because there isn't any. There may be a small book section in a department or stationery store, but except for Bibles, dictionaries, and inexpensive children's books, the selection is very limited, with heavy odds against finding a particular title in stock. Because there is virtually no system for the wholesale distribution of books, the special ordering of any particular book is a real chore for the book-dealer, who would often rather lose the sale than undertake the trouble. An American bookbuyer must be more than literate. He must be diligent to the point of stubbornness in seeking the books he wants. And, of course, the present system seriously discourages growth in the size of the reading

\* O. H. Cheney, *Economic Survey of the Book Industry 1930-1931* (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1931).

public. It is easier to spend disposable income in a dozen other ways, and this is precisely what happens.

Book distribution in the United States is frequently compared unfavorably with distribution in Europe. There bookstores are plentiful and well scattered, with a wider assortment of titles. Booksellers are more knowledgeable and carry greater prestige in the community. Highly developed wholesaling systems can supply any book to any store virtually overnight. The American publisher enjoys daydreaming on what it would be like if he had the advantages of his European colleague. European book distribution is more effective. It may result in part from the greater respect for learning, which is part of the European tradition, from cartelization and tight control of competition, from less serious competition from other forms of entertainment and information, or from a number of other factors peculiar to the European situation.

If book distribution in the United States is to be changed, it will not be by transforming our cultural and business environment to match the European; it will be by finding the factors in our own situation which make an improvement in book distribution economically sound and attractive. The responsibility for making such a change—and the principal responsibility for the present distribution “tragedy”—must rest not with author, wholesaler, or bookseller, but squarely with the publisher himself. Without distribution, the author is talking to himself. Yet publishers devote far more thought and attention to the editorial and esthetic aspects of the book than to the problem of placing it within reach of the book-buyer. American trade-book publishing, despite recent mergers, is still typically a small, privately held and personally managed business. The owners, where they have inherited the firm, have been raised in the editorial tradition, and newcomers are attracted by the appeal of an exciting literary and cultural atmosphere and the opportunity to influence the direction of American letters. Traditionally, publishers have shown little interest in the “business” aspects of their industry (they would like to say profession). Not only in distribution, but also in the manufacture of books and in general business practices, we book publishers are many years behind the times; failing to take advantage of developments in other sections of industry and failing to realize the degree to which changes in the environment in which book publishing operates have made old practices obsolete.

Our failure to develop improved book distribution, like our failure to



take advantage of modern high-speed printing and binding methods which could save the industry millions of dollars annually, is not the result of willful perversity. In both cases, publishers are applying methods and practices, well adapted to an earlier business environment, with an uneasy feeling that there are better ways, but not yet under sufficient economic and social pressure to risk changes which traditionalists (experts by survival) can only view with horror.

The present methods of book distribution came into being, not as the result of study or deliberate planning, nor as the result of the activity of some dominating firm or industry leader, but as an adaptation of hundreds of small independent units (publishers, wholesalers, booksellers) to the pressures of the actual situation. One aspect of this adaptation was that anyone who felt that the industry was too confining, or that its methods were archaic or unnatural, or who could not remain financially solvent under industry conditions, left book publishing to do something else, a kind of Darwinian natural selection which explains why the present situation is considered "natural" by people in the trade-book business who are annoyed with the impatient criticism of outsiders.

One very important fact that conditions American publishing and book distribution has unquestionably been the cultural level of American life. Like it or not, education, cultural achievement, and the printed word have not had the prestige in the United States that they have had in Europe. Our immigrants have stood out in their eagerness to give their children a college education at whatever sacrifice, in the belief that all doors open for the man of learning, whatever his origins. In the European social scale, despite the tradition of class rule, money counts somewhat less than in the United States and learning somewhat more. Americans have tended to regard "too much" learning (an amount quickly reached) with suspicion, and a strong undercurrent of anti-intellectualism has generally been present, rising to the surface from time to time. The statistics of college enrollment are almost misleading, for the American college campus is not strongly intellectual in flavor.

The difference between the United States and Europe is one of degree. Anti-intellectualism has played its part there too, and not all European college students are serious searchers for the truth. However, it is true that over the years the book has meant more to the European than to the American, and this is something which no publisher or bookseller could change. The result is a narrower economic base on which American

publishing might build. Bookstores have a special "bookish" atmosphere, presumably cozy, inviting and comfortable for the small intellectual elite, but mysterious and a little frightening to the ordinary citizen. Another very important influence has been the existence of a strong library system, public and institutional. On one hand, libraries place books within a convenient reach of the reader at no cost, and they offer a much more complete selection than even a large bookseller does. On the other hand, by offering a large, easily serviced market to the publisher, they reduce his need of relying on the bookseller and his commitment to the welfare of the bookstore channel of distribution.

Possibly because of the narrower market, because of higher labor costs and inefficiencies in distribution, the trade book in America has been a relatively expensive commodity. This has narrowed the booksellers' audience still further and increased the attraction of the local library. Remove the library market, and most American trade-book publishers would quietly vanish from the lists. The public may imagine publishing to be an exhilarating competition among best-sellers, but in fact the average sale for a trade book is about 4,000 copies, of which half are likely to go to libraries. The sale to libraries is the more profitable half, for it is made with a considerably smaller investment in sales time, billing and accounting cost, and processing returns. It is more predictable and involves less publishing risk. Even remote libraries react on their own initiative to the new publication lists, without prodding from the publishers' salesmen. Thus they help keep alive the small publisher who cannot afford to maintain a sales organization. The library system also makes possible the publication of many titles (all to the good) which may have no real hope of bookstore sale but which are introduced into the distribution network in a rather haphazard fashion in the hope of getting "additional" sales.

It is not surprising that most publishers have weak sales organizations for serving the bookseller and that they are not inclined to invest in expanding them. The typical publisher covers the United States with five or six men, at least some of whom he shares with other publishers. This he reckons sufficient to give good attention to the twenty-five or fifty important stores (including department stores), and moderate attention to perhaps three or four hundred additional stores. Distances in the United States dictate that these men will do much more traveling than selling. The moderately sized store outside New York City will be visited by the

publisher's representative perhaps twice a year, when during two or three hours a hundred new titles and many more backlist titles must be discussed, together with promotion and advertising plans, special campaigns, etc.

The hazards of infrequent sales calls (and the weakness of wholesaling) and the importance of the period immediately after the book is reviewed have caused the publisher to invent the "advance," which is the quantity of a new title sold to the store prior to publication. Because the salesman will not be back for months, because the success of the book is hard to predict, and because the publisher cannot depend on the bookseller's initiative to order additional copies fast enough, the salesman is supposed to sell the store an "advance" large enough to cover the most optimistic sales hopes. Cheney pointed out in 1931 that the publishers' emphasis on "advances" places a great strain on the bookseller, who is forced to buy with little information, far in advance of critical reviews or public response. On the other hand, without the publisher's salesman to remind him to reorder strong titles, and the general sluggishness of the system for processing and shipping orders, very few books sell beyond their original "advance." The result is a heavy pressure from home on the salesman to "get the advance."

Since the bookseller cannot buy large quantities of everything, the salesmen have invented the "skip," which is an understanding that many titles may be ignored or slighted in exchange for a large order for the one or two "lead" books, the sales score of which is being tallied hourly back home in the sales manager's office. None of this would be possible without the trade practices of "return," under which the store may return unsold books for full credit. Usually books must be returned before a deadline date, which explains the miraculous way in which stores are cleaned out of last season's titles. The best-seller gamble requires heavy prepublication printings to supply the "advance" and to have stocks ready for the anticipated buying surge. The result is frequently a heavy "return," which is the basis for a small industry within the industry called "remaindering." This is the sale of last season's books at bargain counters at prices that tend to make the public feel that anyone who pays the original price is a fool.

The publisher's sales methods tend to shorten the life span of the book. The ones that survive to become part of the backlist have unusual pulling power. The short, infrequent visits of salesmen, with the pressure on forth-

coming titles, leave no time for attention to backlists. The salesman knows, too, that the store's budget is limited and is afraid that an order for a backlist will reduce the amount available for "advances." Frequently a title with a good potential sale over a long period has been killed off by an advance sale that is high in relation to immediate public response. The result is a quick return, and then the remainder stacks, with only a fraction of the sales the book deserves. The emphasis on "advance" contributes also to an environment in which wholesaling cannot exist. "Advance" sales are too much a matter of life and death to be left to a wholesaler. The publisher would be willing to have the wholesaler handle "pick-up" orders, but since he is determined to make the "advance" large enough to preclude pick-ups, he leaves little business to the wholesaler. The business he does leave is the most uneconomic kind—small quantities of an unpredictable few from a large variety of titles, requiring heavy investment in inventory and complicated procedures for filling orders.

Book publishing is one of the few industries with virtually no wholesaling facilities. There are some "wholesalers." Their principal business is not with bookstores but with libraries, which do not require fast delivery or attractive discounts. In the face of sketchy coverage by the publisher and the absence of wholesalers, the bookseller plugs the gaps himself. He controls his stocks, reorders the titles that sell, returns the ones that do not, tries to guess reading trends, and promotes the books that seem to have potential sale among his clientele. This is not easy. He must deal with several hundred publishers, each of whom, out of individuality and a fear of prosecution by the Federal Trade Commission, maintains different discount schedules, terms, etc. The terms keep changing and are frequently spiced with limited-time offers and special deals, requiring a high-speed computer to sort them out. The clerical burdens imposed by this chaotic situation are enormous. The multiplicity of orders to be placed, packages to be received, records to be kept, checks to be written, etc., would discourage anyone except the most diehard lover of books.

Furthermore, since he deals in books which may sell two or three copies a year and for which demand is extremely variable from month to month, the bookseller cannot, even at great clerical expense, set up a sales-recording system which will help him determine how many copies of any particular title he may expect to sell next week or next month as an aid to making a buying decision. Intuition and the "feel" of long experience must play a large part in his buying decisions. But "feel" can stretch very

thin as the number of titles increases. The bookseller must choose his stocks from approximately 10,000 new hardbound and 2,000 new paperbound titles each year and from perhaps 70,000 hardbound and 15,000 paperbound backlist titles already in print. Even for a small bookstore carrying perhaps 3,000 titles, this involves thousands of buying decisions (and return decisions) each year—with a high probability that many of the decisions are not the best. It is not surprising that there are not many retail booksellers and that there is no press of people eager to join the select few. Actually, any who might venture into the field face the additional handicap that there is nowhere to go for help and advice. Anyone interested in going into the retailing of greeting cards, ice cream, or gasoline (all infinitely less complex businesses) will find many manufacturers eager to offer advice and even financial help. But there is no way to learn book retailing except by doing it, and no one to help you except yourself.

Over the years, the gaps in the satisfaction of America's book needs by the publisher-bookseller combination have offered opportunities for other ways of reaching the public. One of the most important of these, highly developed by some publishers, is direct mail selling. Some direct mail is intended to bring a book of specialized interest more directly to the attention of its potential buyer than is economically possible through unspecialized bookstore distribution. Some direct mail depends on the fact that a large percentage of the population does not have a bookstore conveniently available. The less specialized the direct mail appeal, the more likely a heavy reliance on bargain appeals and special offers. A new kind of direct mail effort has been developed in recent years by magazine publishers, who have used their own editorial material as the basis for creating oversize, elaborately illustrated "furniture" books and their own subscription lists for selling them. Further expansion of this kind of direct mail is limited, since it is open only to those who possess both editorial and mailing list assets. It is also limited by the capacity of the magazines' captive audience to absorb "furniture" books.

The book clubs have added two important ingredients to the convenience and bargain appeal of direct mail selling. They invented the device of the automatic shipment of books, counting on the club member's inertia to keep the books coming and on his honesty to pay for them. The book club also provides respected authority to choose for the member, from the confusing abundance of new titles, the one book which the

member can be sure will please him. This greatly reduces the risk of his purchase, while the bargain prices reduce his expenditure. Book clubs have undoubtedly done a great deal to widen book readership and ownership and to increase the public stature of authors lucky enough to be chosen. Advertising by the clubs has stimulated the sales of the same titles in the bookstores. Although considered deadly and unfair competition by many booksellers, the clubs have probably added to total book consumption much more than any small amount of business they may have diverted from the bookstores. In recent years book clubs have felt the going get rougher. Competition among the clubs has encouraged offering greater bargains while making it difficult to maintain the large memberships that make the bargains possible. To some extent the clubs have worn out their lode by working it too hard, offering more selections and special sales than their members can keep up with.

Probably the greatest blow to the popular book clubs has been dealt by the relatively new industry of paperback publishing, which has made popular titles available everywhere at prices which outbargain the book clubs. Mass paperbacks are perhaps more an outgrowth of magazines than of books. They result from the simple but revolutionary idea of putting a low-priced edition of a popular book on newsstands within the reach of everyone. After the rush of sales slackens, it is removed to make room for the next title. Mass paperback publishing started before the war but exploded in growth immediately after. It has not only affected book clubs but has also deeply shaken trade-book publishing and has prepared the way for radical changes, some of which have already started, with more to come. At the same time the new giant, mass paperback publishing, is itself undergoing changes which are likely to alter it greatly and bring it into sharper conflict with conventional publishing.

Paperbacks, with their low retail prices and blanket sales coverage, have quickly replaced most hardbound reprint lines, and they have improved markedly on their volume of sales. They have proved that there is a market for books (at least, certain kinds of books) far beyond the market reached by conventional publishing and bookstore distribution. The books are distributed by magazine wholesalers in the magazine manner. They remain the property of the publisher, who is paid only after the books are sold and who must be prepared to take back whatever is not sold at his expense. Many titles published and distributed this way have

sold more than a million copies, and one hundred thousand is considered a sensible minimum quantity for distribution.

At first the newsstands were taking books as fast as they could be turned out, and a new printing and binding industry was created to supply the demand. Since then paperback publishing has gone through some changes as competition has crowded the field and the leading publishers have sought to overcome the restrictions of magazine distribution methods. The prices of the books have risen. They started at a uniform twenty-five cents. Now a price of fifty, sixty or seventy-five cents is common, with some books at thirty-five and some at ninety-five cents. The rise has been forced only partly by increased manufacturing costs. More important has been the rise in the cost of the magazine type of distribution as this kind of publishing developed beyond its simple early form. At the number of titles competing for space on the newsstand increased, the costly return of unsold books has increased correspondingly. As publishers tried to expand the scope of their publishing to include more sophisticated or specialized titles, returns have climbed still further.

The magazine method of distribution worked smoothly and cheaply so long as the books closely resembled magazines. The titles had to be few in number to reduce confusion in record-keeping in the warehouse, on the truck, or on the newsstand. The books were more successful if they adhered to a formula, so that each fan recognized the next mystery or western or sex novel in the series without excessive searching. The books must have universal and instantaneous appeal, since they appear in all parts of the country at the same time, and they must start selling immediately at all locations. A recent hardcover best-seller or an important movie tie-in is fine, but other departures from stereotype are dangerous.

The great appeal of the magazine method of distribution, in addition to bringing books to completely new sections of the American public, was the advantage of a ready-made, available, organized network of distribution requiring no investment in time or money. This made the relatively high discounts demanded by magazine wholesalers easier for the publisher to bear. However, as the output grew in number and variety, publishers found it necessary to create parallel selling organizations of substantial size. Book people were needed to advise and police the relatively unsophisticated wholesalers' crews, to assure that titles appeared when and where they should, and were sensibly and not haphazardly replaced as new

ones were published. They were also needed to reach additional outlets (bookstores, variety stores, toy stores, etc.) which the magazine wholesaler could not reach or where he was not welcome. The development of auxiliary selling forces has reached the point that magazine distribution can no longer be said to be the characteristic of mass paperback publishing. The few publishers who have stayed with the magazine patterns and with magazine distribution to avoid the investment in a sales organization are finding their position considerably less secure.

Two important side effects of the mass paperback explosion have been the acceptance of the paperback format as a "real" book and the development of specialized equipment to make books in this format simply and inexpensively. This has made possible another form of publishing and distribution that has only a physical resemblance to the mass paperback—the "quality" paperback. Although quality paperback publishing is considered as general or trade publishing, it is heavily influenced by academic needs, and it looks to the campus as its principal market. The object of the publisher is to get the professor to recommend or require the reading of as many of his titles as possible, for then he is assured that distribution will follow almost automatically. The professor is generally reached through direct mail with offers of examination copies of appropriate books. Quality paperbacks also reach bookstores in the same manner and through the same sales "organization" as hardbound books; but, without the strong pressure of assigned reading, the quality paperback could not justify publication. The experimental, nontraditional attitude of hundreds of new professors has made the quality paperback appealing as a teaching tool, and the spectacular increase in college enrollments has made it economically sound.

The changes taking place in publishing and in its environment seem to be the portents of bigger changes still to come. The pressures for the expansion of publishing and distribution are not likely to be contained by traditions and taboos. The development of new methods of printing and binding that are slowly being introduced into book publishing are lowering the cost for large quantities, but they are increasing the cost for small quantities, and are forcing the publisher to find more buyers for each title. The changing nature of mass paperback publishing is elevating it in both style and content and is bringing it into the retail bookstores. And although the paperback publisher has no ready-made solutions, he has a



fresh enthusiasm, and his impatience with low sales figures stimulates innovation.

The growth of education since the war and the recognition of its importance since Sputnik have changed the dimensions of the book market. The shift of rural population into and around urban centers has simplified the problem of reaching more people. The rise in the standard of living and in leisure time provides opportunities for relaxation and self-improvement and also the means of satisfying them. Despite the competition from television and motorcar, these advances must increase our appetite for reading. The growing social awareness arising out of the expanding importance of America, from increased travel, and from contacts with less familiar groups and social backgrounds, creates a need best filled by books.

All these changes are not lost on the leaders in retailing. They are becoming increasingly more interested in books, and they are bringing a different approach to bookselling—demanding that publishers conform to good retailing practice. The new type of retail executive in the department store, the discount house, and even in the large bookstore is ready to apply the methods used successfully with drugs or greeting cards and is educating the publisher to requirements of mark-up, stock turnover and volume per square foot about which he neither knew nor cared in the past. The new retailer is happy to sell books, but he is inclined to shift to the publisher many of the burdens of stock control and merchandising, and he insists on regular and frequent service. The publisher who does not have the organization to satisfy these demands will find his wares gradually less welcome.

The increased emphasis on distribution is likely to change the bookish, relaxed atmosphere of trade publishing. Whatever may be lost is small compared to the gain for authors and public. The reader will have books available more consistently and in greater variety. The fate of a book is less likely to follow the best-seller pattern—success for a handful and oblivion for most. Much of American industry has gone through a revolution in distribution in recent years, as far-reaching in its way as the earlier revolution in manufacturing. The book industry is not immune—just tardy.

*The Bookshop in America*

WE SAY THAT a culture is great if those who share in it produce creative works, if there are an appreciative and discriminating body of reproducers and a still larger body of consumers of the creative works of times present and past. The audience cannot exist without the body of reproducers, institutionally organized. Without them the works of the mind, of imagination, reason, observation, and manual skill cannot reach the audience. The need is particularly great in areas with large populations and extensive territory. In some respects, the activity of the creative powers is itself dependent on the existence of an appreciative audience which arouses and draws forth exertion from the creators. The audience also is a reservoir from which further new creators, working within a tradition which gives form to their talents, can come forward. This audience, intimately involved in creation, might well be a small one, and in great cultures of the past it has been small. In contemporary society we cannot confine ourselves to the creative stratum alone in estimating our cultural prosperity. Our modern conception of the common good requires a much more widespread sharing in the inherited and in the newly created works of culture. That is why contemporary "mass" society has greater need for a more complex institutional system of reproduction and distribution than had the great societies of classical antiquity, the Orient, or modern Europe up to the present century.

The institutions of reproduction and distribution are the publishing houses, the schools from the most elementary to the highest, the periodical press and even the daily press, museums, libraries both private and public, art galleries in which works of art are sold or exhibited, and bookshops. In this essay, I shall deal only with bookshops, which seem, to one of my interests, an almost indispensable part of life. Like libraries, one goes to them for what one knows and wants and to discover books one did not know before. A good bookshop blows the breeze of contemporaneity on

one; it puts one "in touch"; it permits first contacts and offers prospects of greater intensity. It is a place for intellectual conviviality, and it has the same value as conversation, not as a "civilized art" but as a necessary part of the habitat of a lively intelligence in touch with the world.

My own relations with bookshops began more than forty years ago and they have extended into many countries and to all continents. I have gone to bookshops to buy and browse. I have gone to them to buy books I wanted, and because I just wanted to buy a book, and much of the time just because I wanted to be among books to inhale their presence. My case is an extreme one, and there are perhaps few people in my generation, more or less in their right minds and heavily engaged with all sorts of duties, who have spent so much time in bookshops as I have. I have talked with booksellers of every kind, angular Brahmins, mad *Ostjuden*, motherly widows, elegant patricians, sweet mice, and cagy and distrustful touts. I have in the course of years read a fair amount on the history of the book trade. From all this, I claim some authority to speak about the state of the retail book trade in the United States.

I shall put my conclusion first. The retail book trade in new and second-hand books in the United States is in many important respects in an unsatisfactory condition throughout much of the country. There are some bright spots here and there, but on the whole the situation depresses, even appalls me. And it seems to be getting worse. It is not just because of my having less time now and so many books already that bookshops have become less attractive to me. My heart still pants for them "as the hart panteth after the water brook," but all too often it pants without satisfaction. If it were not for the simple primordial facts of birth and marriage, and the need to celebrate birthdays and wedding anniversaries, and the occurrence of illness and the need to be treated with special indulgence by friends and relatives, there would be even more communities within the United States which have no bookshops that are even as good as the poor things many of them have become today. In good part, many bookshops exist as adjuncts to the trade in greeting and commiseration cards and as a sector of the "gift" industries.

In some respects this is anomalous. The number of titles published each year in the United States goes up more or less constantly. The proportion of the public with college and university education increases yearly as the size of the student body in colleges and universities increases. We know that most undergraduates in most of the state universities and in many of

the private colleges and universities do precious little reading, and only that which is required of them according to a fairly light prescription of "set" books. We know also that many male graduates of colleges and universities read even less after they have taken their degrees. Even if we omit the students and many graduates from the ranks of significant book-buyers, the number of college and university teachers is itself so great that this population, it would appear, should provide a rather considerable custom for maintaining a brisk book trade. Why then, even in university communities, where this presumed clientele is concentrated, should the shops selling new and second-hand books be so few in number and so unsatisfactory in quality? By "unsatisfactory," I mean having so few current titles and more particularly so few—even fewer—of the titles still in print but not published within the past two years.\* There are other unsatisfactory features, such as the practice of wrapping the books in cellophane so that they cannot be opened. These are trivial complaints. The more serious complaint is that bookshops with substantial stocks of new books covering a wide range of subjects are too few for the cultural needs of the country and for the fostering of a worthwhile pleasure.

American authors write some very important and many fairly important books, literary, scholarly, and scientific, and so do British authors. British publishers and, with their cooperation, American publishers also produce a moderate number of translations of continental books. The interests of American readers respond to a very wide range of intellectual productions. Saul Bellow, Wright Morris, Richard Stern, C. P. Snow, Iris Murdoch, Evelyn Waugh, Junichero Tanizaki, Graham Greene, and William Golding are only a few among the many authors who have some readers in the United States, who receive serious and generally approving reviews in the main periodicals. Yet unless their works have been reprinted in paperback series, one is virtually never able to find them except in very few bookshops in this populous country. Books which have been out for more than a year are not kept in stock. Often the most recent one will not be visible either. There are extraordinarily few shops in which a prospective bookbuyer who knows what he wants or a browser seeking orienta-

\* It is true that the production of paperback books has begun to change all this situation markedly. As far as this category of books is concerned, we are even beginning to find a situation that is almost unique in the history of the book trade in my experience, in which fresh copies of old titles are to be found segregated in certain bookshops while fresh copies of newly published books are found in other bookshops or in other sections of the same bookshop.

tion and pleasure can see "what's new" or "what's coming out." New York has a respectable number of good shops, Boston has at least one, Cambridge two or three, Philadelphia has one. Chicago is very poorly provided for, and so is Los Angeles; Washington has two, there are two or three in San Francisco. Except for Cambridge, almost all these good shops are in the central business district. Few universities have good bookshops within their environs, but for the most part college and university bookshops mainly carry textbooks. Of course there is a large number of bookshops and department stores that stock large numbers of best-sellers and overstuffed political books on the menace of Communism and the world crisis in its various manifestations, as well as puffy and pallid biographies, but little else—little history or poetry.

What are the reasons for this unpleasant and inconvenient situation? First, our fellow countrymen are not readers. This lamentable fact has been documented by some sample surveys in various countries which have shown that at any given time the United States is fairly far down on the list of the literate countries as compared with the Scandinavian or the Low Countries or even England, which is, with respect to most of its population, not a land of great readers. Even university teachers, once they pass forty, are not heavy readers over a wide range of subjects. Second, in large part because of the lack of readers, the retail book trade is not a profitable investment; and third, its unprofitability is accentuated by the practice of American publishing firms who, through their direct sale of single copies at a discount to individual readers, render the retail book trade even less profitable than it need be. All these things are interconnected.

Perhaps our fellow countrymen would read more books if they saw more books. But how, even in university towns, are they to see books if they are nowhere to be found except in the university library (to which only research students and the younger members of the staff in the humanities and social sciences are frequent visitors, while the older members, if they read anything other than mimeographed or cyclostyled materials, read books given them by their protégés, colleagues, friends, and publishers seeking their favor)?

It is often claimed by the declared enemies of obscene literature that the reading of that genre will lead to the performance of wicked actions. That may or may not be the case, but certainly browsing in bookshops is conducive to buying books, and not going into them is very conducive to not buying them. Yet how can one go into a bookshop if there is none, or

if the few which do exist have so few titles and add so few that even the compelling passion to buy books cannot avoid cooling?

American anglophiles, bemoaning the condition of their own country, like to point to the great British bookshops like Blackwell's or Heffer's or The Economist Bookshop in London with its extraordinarily comprehensive collection of books on the social sciences in the English language, to say nothing of the great bookshops of the Continent. Let us deal with Heffer's and Blackwell's first. They are both great bookshops, particularly the latter. They have the great advantage of existing in university towns, where the teaching staff has traditionally been humanistic and bookish—although the balance is changing in both Oxford and Cambridge in a scientific direction. The models presented by their teachers, the accessibility and amplitude of the stocks in the bookshops, and the credit practices of the shops themselves have encouraged undergraduates to buy books. Nonetheless, these shops would not be a patch on what they are if they had to depend only on their local clientele. They are suppliers to the world. They supply not only the local teachers and students but also the Oxford and Cambridge graduates who have "gone down" to London, to West Africa, or to India, or Malaya, or the United States. A substantial part of their business is with university graduates and teachers throughout the world, the university and college libraries, the libraries of learned societies, and in many countries the governmental libraries. They are particularly patronized by American university and college teachers, who are the main bookbuyers in the United States. The excellence of Heffer's and Blackwell's, which gives such gratification to those who live in Oxford or Cambridge, or who visit them from elsewhere, is integral to the relatively poor quality of the American bookshops, general and university. The poor quality of the bookshops in so many American academic communities is in part the product of the restricted bookbuying of American academic persons, but it is also a product of the widespread practice of purchasing books from foreign bookshops. It is a vicious circle. The shops are poor because there are not enough buyers, and those buyers who have to get their books by postal order turn to better shops overseas. The situation is maintained in its deplorable condition by the propensity of American booksellers who sell books printed in Great Britain, to mark up the price to such an extent that, instead of paying about seventeen cents per shilling (including the cost of postage on ordering, shipment, and remittance) on a British book he orders from a British bookseller, the

purchaser has to pay as much as twenty-five to thirty cents per shilling to the American bookseller.

American booksellers are also handicapped in many cases by the assignment of rights in the American markets to American publishers whose price is about fifty percent higher than the British. Those who would stock British scholarly and scientific books which are not affected by the assignment of rights but which have a low turnover are almost always very short of capital and cannot keep a very large stock in hand. They therefore cannot offer the compensating advantage of immediate supply to offset the disadvantages of their high mark-up. The high mark-up on the books which they do have in stock discourages buyers who know that with a bit of delay they can get the same book for about a third less by ordering it directly from a British bookshop.

The practice of the American book publisher of selling books directly at a discount of ten to twenty percent to individual purchasers undoes the advantage of the discount which publishers give to booksellers and which is sometimes as large as forty-five percent. Direct mail selling, with which publishers are becoming increasingly enamored in the United States (largely because of the scanty coverage of the country provided by the retail book trade, a poor state which they themselves helped to bring about) will further damage the American retail book trade. The effects are especially seen in university communities, where there is a larger book-buying public and where the serious book trade might well be expected to take refuge and make its last stand. The capacity of university communities to sustain shops specializing in literary, scholarly, and scientific works which are not best-sellers is reduced by the understandable inclination of academic purchasers to buy their books directly at a discount from publishers. This additional circumvention of the local bookshop shrinks the scope of its stock and dulls its enterprise.

American publishers are becoming increasingly possessed by a zeal to be moneymakers; they are increasingly possessed by the ideal of the supermarket, the discount house, the mail-order house, and the book clubs. As Wall Street enters into the publishing business (an occupation which, if it has not been an "occupation for gentlemen," has hitherto been an occupation for fuddyduds), it will show less patience with the outlets and with their goods which reach so few people. They will try to develop means of reaching their market other than the conventional retail bookshop. It is difficult to prove that by doing this they will be destroying their small goose

which occasionally lays them a small golden egg, but I think that this is what might well happen.

A bookshop, in order to be good, must have a large stock of books for which there is not likely to be a great demand but for which there will be an occasional demand. This means, unlike the retail trade in groceries, or the practice in industry to produce on order, a bookshop must render its capital inert by putting a lot of it into slow-moving lines. It is not the availability of the best-seller or the book that is likely to be in great demand which makes a good bookshop, but rather many slow-moving lines. The book clubs were the first to deal a heavy blow to the American retail trade in new books, because they deprived the shops of those books which had a fairly sure sale in quantities large enough to support the more slowly moving categories of books. Furthermore, the movement of those lines which sell more slowly had more chance of being brought into a somewhat faster movement through potential customers' coming into the shop to look for the books of which they already knew and which were in the category of best-sellers. Where the direct mail trade and the book clubs are successful, they deprive the bookshops not only of the sales of the more popular books which are sold in this way but also of the "halo effect" which throws its light on the shelves and tables holding the more slowly moving lines.

The wonder is, given the unremunerativeness of the business, that bookshops exist at all. It takes a special kind of person, somewhat daft in a socially useful and quite pleasant way but nonetheless somewhat off his head, to give himself to bookselling. Why should anyone who has or who can obtain \$10,000 or \$20,000 invest it in a bookshop to sell serious books when, if he were an economically reasonable person, he would do better to open a beauty parlor or a hamburger and barbecue shop, or put his money into the stock market? The bookseller must be one of those odd people who just love the proximity of books. The desire to be a bookseller is not highly correlated with being a great reader. It is the simple fact of being in physical intimacy with books which keeps booksellers going, which occasionally attracts a new one, and keeps those who are already in the business from leaving it.

They are a small part of the human race, not generally appreciated by those who benefit from them or by those improvers and urban reconstructors of university communities who fail to understand that outside a central business district (and often even in those) a good bookshop can-



not afford to pay the rental required for a tenancy of a new building.\* Bookselling in the United States requires a certain decay, not only to provide a congenial atmosphere for the amiable, mad, or mousy people who are willing to undertake the unrewarding work of investing in and operating them, but also because the turnover and the margins of the book trade are too small to permit high rentals to be paid.

In addition to all these burdens, booksellers, like other employers, have been facing rising labor costs. The ordinary young man who is knowledgeable about books and reasonably intelligent will get a Ph.D. in English and become a college teacher. If he is just bookish and not so interested in the content of books, he can become a professional librarian—a profession which, even though it pays poorly, is at least thought to be a profession with a steady salary. There are not very many people who “know books,” who like to know of the books which are coming out, who are at ease among reference books, who can locate a book of which a potential customer knows neither the title nor the author. Good ones are scarce, and to be retained they require a good salary. One who is good and does not require a high salary must be so devoted to books that the low remuneration does not deter him from sticking to work which does not offer many other compensations. This type too is rare. As a result, booksellers end up without any assistants or with a commercial flotsam and jetsam, male or female, ignorant of books and of bibliographical apparatus, uninterested and ready to leave after a short time. To retain even such people costs more money now than it used to, and the small margin of most bookshops cannot carry that burden easily. The shops accordingly have to depend on an inefficient motley, which reduces further the efficiency of a generally unbusinesslike branch of retail trade. Bookshops are rendered less tempting through such employees, since the quality of their stock depends on the bookseller’s and his assistant’s knowledge of the tastes of his prospective customers. It takes an “instinct” for books to know what should be ordered, and the “instinct” is a product of imagination and experience. The manpower (or womanpower) of the retail book trade in the United States does not possess this imagination, and it does not stay long enough to acquire it.

\* Urban reconstruction and the proletarianization of the great cities will damage the retail book trade, knocking out the second-hand shops by destroying the buildings in which they can live economically, driving out of the city their clientele of browsers on Saturday afternoons, and moving into the suburbs the trade in birthday, anniversary, and sickness gift cards which is such an important source of revenue for the retail trade in new books.

As a result, the person who wants a particular book and who can afford to wait for it (as he would have to do in any case when the bookseller orders it for him) will order it directly from the publisher. The person who wants a book in a particular class, but no particular book in that class, will allow a book club to choose it for him. Only the person who needs a book *as such*—merely a book, any book, for a gift to someone else—can be quite certain of getting what he wants in most American bookshops today.

The second-hand book trade falls into three categories: the antiquarian book trade, the second-hand trade in good scholarly and scientific books and worthwhile literary works, and last, the junk shops. The first need not detain us very long as far as the United States is concerned. There is not a sufficient supply of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and early nineteenth-century European and English books coming into the market in most American cities and university towns. There are a few dealers who specialize in such books, but their prices are prohibitive and ridiculously incommensurate with the prices for which the same books can be purchased on the Continent or in England. They are really purveyors to rich and probably indiscriminate collectors, for example, physicians with a hobby in the history of certain diseases or the history of medicine generally. They do not supply individual scholars or even university and college libraries. It is unlikely that this branch of the second-hand book trade will become more significant for the educated public in general or for the culture of the country, and it would be no loss if it did not exist at all.

The junk shops have a wide range, from adjuncts to second-hand furniture establishments dealing in dismantled households to the Fourth Avenue or South Clark Street shops. They are good for young boys and for old men. However, they too are up against it in consequence of universal education and of urban renewal, which dissolves their traditional clientele and takes away their premises. The second class of second-hand bookshop is really the heart of the matter. Its educative value has been great; it has given pleasure and enlightenment to many autodidacts. It is a great thing for schoolboys and university students; and it is economical and useful, as well as pleasant, for people who have a more serious or professional interest in books which are less expensive than new books, or books which are out of print and yet not sufficiently rare to cause them

to be priced out of the market. Such bookshops, like those which deal in comparable new books, must contain a large proportion of slow-moving lines. This demands capital and space. They must have large quantities of books in order to please the variegated tastes of many relatively impecunious customers. To get a few good books from a lot which a bereaved widow puts up for sale or which an old couple wish to dispose of, it is often necessary for the bookseller to purchase a considerable number of poor books which are not poor enough to throw away, which are not likely to sell quickly, and which he must store somewhere, and which, when he sells them, will bring him very little money. This has to be done over and over again to build up a respectable stock.

The ideal location for second-hand bookshops of this sort is the marginal area of the central business district or the university community. In both these areas they require buildings which are no longer new and which do not have high rentals. If these areas undergo reconstruction for office buildings, or for "public amenities," or for the construction of high speed "thruways," the bookshops have to seek refuge elsewhere. They can come to the university communities, where they still can do a certain amount of direct over-the-counter business in their shops. Even then, since the off-the-street trade is bound to be small in a university town, they will be increasingly forced to rely on mail-order selling, which entails the production and distribution of catalogs. For the mass of mediocre books in their stock, this is scarcely likely to be a very profitable undertaking, unless they can share in the growing demand emanating from university libraries. Urban reconstruction will increasingly force second-hand bookdealers of this class into dependence on the mail-order trade. This is even truer for those displaced booksellers who give up off-the-street business altogether and depend entirely on mail-order trade. Their living must come from libraries, from bookbuyers who know exactly what they want, or the book-searchers and bagmen who prowl about on the lookout for books which they can resell to libraries, collectors, or fools for large sums of money.

It is necessary at this stage to mention the significance of the "quality" paperback books for the second-hand trade in books. These books have created an unprecedented situation in the United States and for that matter in almost any country. Never in my lifetime have there been so many outstanding books of the century or even of modern times simultaneously

in print and available in bookshops. Leaving aside for the moment the extraordinary physical bewilderment into which one is thrown on entering a paperback bookshop or the paperback section of a general bookshop, because of the diversity of size, format, and style of the books, the prospect is one of enormous richness. The holdings of American bookshops have gone up tremendously in quality because of this innovation; but it has and will have its price. The titles in the "quality" paperback series are for the most part very good ones which have not been in print for some years. These were usually printed in small editions and, without having become rarities bringing high prices, had become very scarce. These were the kinds of books for which one looked in second-hand bookshops or, even if not looking for them, one bought if one happened to see them. Now these riches of Araby are available to anyone whose neck is flexible enough to turn it this way and that so that he can read the titles on the spines. He does not now have to spend countless hours before finding Jessie Weston or a translation of Chernyshevsky. These prizes which made browsing in second-hand shops so irrationally rewarding, especially in one's youth, require no exertion now in these unheroic days. They therefore lessen the incentive to browse in second-hand bookshops, because they reduce the likelihood of finds. Furthermore, their price, now that they are in a durable paperback form, usually falls within the range of a second-hand book, so that the mad hunger for bargains which drove one on for many years is diminished. There are reasons for preferring a clothbound book to a paperbound book, but if the price of the latter is lower and the chance of obtaining it much greater, the new paperback book will win all the time. This is another blow at the second-hand trade in serious books, another pressure to drive it out of window-fronted shops and into the mail-order trade.

It may well be that we live in an epoch in which the bookshop is an institution suspended between "the dying old society" and the "society struggling to be born." It has few defenders. Its protagonists are feeble fellows rubbing their eyes dreamily and perplexedly at the entrance to their caves. Those who benefit from their existence (the publishers on the one hand, and readers and potential readers on the other) are hard at work intentionally and unintentionally scuttling them. Perhaps the bookshop belongs to the good things of the bourgeois epoch, like the rule of law, representative institutions, public liberties, and the right of *habeas*

*corpus*, things from which there is a general benefit but which have been so much taken for granted that their beneficiaries have grown careless about their well-being.

Despite the enthusiasm of the specialists in electronic information storage and retrieval, the book will survive for a long time. But it is not so likely that the bookshop as we have known it will survive outside a few great cities and university centers. Even Great Britain, which still has many good bookshops, shows the shape of things to come. The proportion of bookshops which have to sustain themselves by dealing in pen-wipers, blotters, writing pads, and greeting cards or gramophone discs is greatly increased. The number of towns without bookshops is also moving upward. The supply of antiquarian books, although very much better in England, for very obvious reasons, than it is in the United States, is also dwindling because the new universities of England, and of Asia and Africa, and the greatly increased funds available for books for American state-university libraries, have sucked them into a maw from which they will never be disgorged. Their prices are going up to such an extent that they will soon fall into the category of those great works on the diseases of the liver which fascinate American collectors of medical books as long as they are bound in worn calf. British bookshops too are faced with the disappearance of those people who would be willing to work for almost nothing as long as what they were doing was sufficiently genteel. The book clubs are not as prominent in Great Britain, and publishers will not sell to individual purchasers at a discount; nor is urban reconstruction moving so rapidly there that it is depriving booksellers, particularly second-hand booksellers, of the lairs they need in order to carry on their trade.

Nonetheless, the movement goes on apace. Technical and scientific books, especially technical textbooks, make up a larger part of the stock of new bookshops in university communities as well as elsewhere. This situation is more advanced in the United States than in Great Britain, and it may offer a ray of hope that these steady and fast-moving lines will support the slower moving ones. It has not done so in the university bookshops of the United States, and it is only a little more likely that it will do so in Great Britain.

There is a real danger that our more highly educated population of the future will have to live in an environment which is more impoverished

in its provision of variety, and in the minor but still valid pleasure of surprise. New bookshops throughout most of the country will stock a large number of universally available titles of paperbound new books. Second-hand dealers will deal largely with customers who supply them with want lists. Good bookshops will be scarcer than hen's teeth, and countless youths, middle-aged, and aged idlers will have to live without the harmless and permanently enriching experience of a good browse.

THEODORE WILENTZ

## *American Bookselling in the 1960's*

RETAIL BOOKSELLING in the United States can be compared to a garden whose soil has been neglected or ill used. An occasional flower may bloom, but the garden itself cannot. Is the soil good enough, if properly cultivated, to bring forth results worth the effort? Some years ago, I might not have been too sanguine in my answer. Today, however, I believe the United States is at a cultural and economic stage which makes the time ripe for a great growth in the retail bookselling business. It is not only that we are richer, better educated and have more leisure time than ever before, we are also in the position of a family whose ancestors have concentrated on making fortunes and whose descendants are involved in literature and art as a natural part of the social position their family has attained and the milieu in which it grows up and lives. It is symbolic that Rockefeller once meant oil and Ford meant automobiles, whereas both these names today stand also for giant foundations that are important in our cultural life.

Fitting in with this change there has been a revolution in publishing—the paperback revolution—which has enlarged the buying public to a point at which stores are practical in communities where they could not have survived before. Because of their price and variety, paper editions have brought an increasing number of people into bookshops. Of greater ultimate significance is that a generation of young men and women has now grown up which is used to buying books as a matter of course. In future years this will be true for an ever larger percentage of the population.

It has always amazed me that publishers have paid so little attention to developments that might lead to the establishment of a healthy system of retail book outlets. For all practical purposes, publishers have written off the possibility of any growth in bookshops; instead they keep working on ways to bypass them. Trade-book publishing can never come close to its

economic potential and can never properly perform its social purpose unless there is a large number of retailers throughout the nation. A survey made by students of the New York University Graduate Institute of Book Publishing in the fall of 1959 revealed "that availability, not price, was a major factor in the purchase of books." It is the bookstore that must carry, display and sell not only the best selling titles but thousands of others. Bookstores bring before the public the variety and scope of the publishers' output. It cannot be overemphasized that *each bookshop develops in its community and among its customers a pattern of book browsing and book buying that becomes part of a way of life*. Major industries that consider publishing "small-time" spend large sums to attain such a goal in their fields.

Because of their significance in the cultural life of the nation, bookstores must be judged on a social as well as on an economic basis. We must ask whether they are prospering and expanding at a proper rate. We must also ask if they are making available to people a range and quality of titles that keeps the public informed and expands its interest and knowledge. Are they playing the role that John W. Gardner, president of the Carnegie Corporation and the Carnegie Foundation, says they could and should in developing in our society, "a climate of attitudes and values supportive of lifelong learning"?

It is being kind to the bookshops of the United States to say that, on both levels, they are not very successful. I have been told by many visitors from abroad, "It is so hard to find bookstores in America," and "We have bookshops like you have drugstores," and "Why are the bookstores in your country so bad?" There are many reasons for the situation reflected by such comments, but the situation itself cannot be denied. In the United States, the wealthiest nation in the world and one of the best educated, it is sad but true that there are relatively few bookshops, that the general standard of those that exist is low, and the quality of the personnel in them is equally low.

It is difficult to give accurate figures on the number of bookstores in this country, for it is not true that "a bookshop is a bookshop is a bookshop." We are all too familiar with the type of store that has some current sellers, a number of standard reference works, cookbooks, juveniles and/or gifts, toys, cards, party goods, prints, stationery and records in varying combinations. The American Booksellers Association has more than 1,800 members, and not all eligible stores belong. Peter Bart, in the *Saturday*



*Review* of February 9, 1963, says that "there are at best a meager 1,400." Dan Lacy of the American Book Publishers Council estimates that "there are perhaps 1,400 that stock a fairly wide representation of new hardbound books." It is worthy of note that Mr. Lacy uses "new" in the sense of current. The number would have to be greatly reduced if it were to include stores stocking older titles. Leonard Shatzkin, former vice-president of the Crowell-Collier Publishing Co., who has devoted much time to studying distribution figures, says that there are between 325 and 450 shops, including department stores, that get good or moderate attention from publishers' salesmen. That the others may not be worth the salesmen's time may be understood in the light of an estimate by Joseph A. Duffy, executive director of the American Booksellers Association, that, aside from institutional and department stores, there are fewer than 90 shops doing a business of \$100,000 a year in books alone.

It may be thought that as bad as this picture is, it still must represent an improvement over what has been. According to Marshall Best of Viking Press, however, the increase of bookshops "has not kept pace with the growth of population, and their volume of business in books alone has lagged still further behind." At a time when publishing is considered a growth industry by Wall Street, there are predictions that the personal bookshops, excepting the paperback stores, will grow fewer in number, giving way to a small number of large stores selling at discount but paying little attention to back stock and giving way also to a growth in book clubs and in publishers' direct mail selling. I would think it obvious that this would lead to an increase in what Mr. Gardner has called the "peddling of narcotics for the mind and spirit."

If the retail book business is small, it isn't because of lack of consideration. I would give odds that in the course of a year, there isn't anyone in the business who hasn't been told at least once, and probably many more times, "I have often thought of opening a bookstore. I'm sure I would enjoy it." Obviously, practically none of the friends or chance acquaintances who say this ever put the thought into action. The few who do soon find that any idea they had of running a center for gentlemanly literary discussion has no relation to reality. The business has its unique virtues and attractions, but it also has all the problems and aggravations of retailing generally plus a great many peculiar to its field. Basically, a bookseller is dealing with a low-priced "product," and this necessitates a large number of transactions in relation to the total volume of business. This is

complicated by the nature of the merchandise. Each title is a separate stock item. This may add greatly to the interest, since each book has an individual quality, but it also adds greatly to the work. Booksellers stock from 2,000 to, say, 15,000 titles and are supposed to know or be able to tell the customer about thousands of others, either from catalogs or memory. Furthermore, there is a steady stream of new titles being published to be absorbed into stock and/or knowledge. In maintaining stock and filling special orders, the bookseller deals with a number of wholesalers and a great many publishers. The time and paper work it takes is out of proportion, literally overwhelming. Glen Sipe, Jr., vice-president of John Wanamaker, Philadelphia, has pointed out that, in 1959, department stores (including branches) that did over \$50,000,000 gross business did *seven-tenths of a percent* in books. In his store, the bills from the book department were *six percent* (not six-tenths percent) of all the store's invoices. The bookseller and his staff are constantly involved in taking care of customers, checking and arranging stock, taking inventories and giving orders, making window displays, handling charges, handling invoices, answering correspondence, etc. Rather than worry that "the devil has work for idle hands," they know that "a bookseller's work is never done."

If work were all, a bookseller's lot would be a happy one. Booksellers as a rule are devoted to the business, mixing pride and pleasure with their complaints, because they believe in the importance of the "merchandise" they sell. In an age when work has lost its savor, booksellers still find in their occupation a meaning and value that are beyond the making of a living—although a good number of them are not "bookish" and surprisingly, only a few are "intellectuals."

There are at present five chief categories of bookshops: the university stores, the book departments in department stores, the chain bookstores, the personal bookshops and the paperback bookstores. The college stores have the benefit of a captive audience and one that is at an age and stage when it is most likely to buy books. They also may be limited by the size of the student body and of the faculty. In the smaller schools, this is quite a handicap and naturally makes it more difficult to have a good, large stock. What is even more limiting, however, is the fact that such stores are primarily set up to sell textbooks and supplies and often are not concerned with general books. This is true at some of the larger institutions as well. The non-text part of the college bookstore is often treated like the proverbial stepchild. The approach depends a good deal on the man-

ager. College stores which have managers who are interested in books are among the finest bookshops in the country. In addition to reliance on good managers, it would seem worthy if more college administrators would insist on an excellent trade book stock to help in the educational process of their students.

The book sections in department stores vary greatly in size and quality, depending on the location of the store, its policy, its clientele, the management's interest in books, and the ability of the bookbuyer. In many towns, these departments are the only book outlets of any worth, even if the worth is not very great. At one time, a relatively large number of department stores were among the best bookstores in the nation. There are still some excellent ones, but their ranks are dwindling. They all suffer from several basic faults. Being part of a very large establishment, they lack the physical atmosphere of a closed world of books that a good personal bookshop can have. This is more important than it may sound, since the actual experience of browsing in a certain atmosphere is one of the factors that makes book buying a habit. Also missing is the sense of personal relationship. Generally a department store does not develop the same attitude toward the customer that an independent store has. Moreover, while clerks come and go in both types of store, the independent owner stays on, providing a continuing link between the customers and the store. What affects the department store sections even more seriously is their subordination to store policy and their need to operate with all the red tape that a large store's control system requires. Even a highly regarded buyer must adjust his judgment and ideas to instructions from management, and these may have nothing to do with books. The buyer of one of the best book departments in New York told me that she had to price-cut certain books because her superiors told her this was necessary to maintain the store image. The general store approach that thinks in terms of fast turnover of particular items and the slide-rule attitude that measures the value of each foot of space without regard to the whole leads to an emphasis on the most popular books. This is reinforced by the increasing costs of operating and control which make the slow movers unprofitable under the prevalent cost accounting analysis. I still recall my shock a few years ago when the salesman of one of the finest and most respected publishing firms told me that he always had trouble getting the department stores to stock many of his company's books because these books weren't "promotional enough." It is the department stores and the

promotional publishers who build up the importance of the best-seller list, which is so destructive to most publishers and authors, to bookshops and to the reading taste of the public. The department stores have also injured the trade by their use of the book sections as loss leaders for the benefit of the other merchandise sections. In the process their own book departments have been sacrificed since the lowering of profit has been one of the chief causes for the decline of the good department store book sections.

The chain stores, Doubleday and Brentano's for example, do not vary as much among themselves as do the department store book departments. Indeed one of the chains' major failings is that they vary hardly at all except for the differences made necessary by the physical size of the branches. From the point of view of the chains, this is a virtue for reasons of control, efficient operation, training of personnel, central buying and store image. But as a result, they all tend to have a cold, impersonal atmosphere. For almost the same reasons as the department stores, they, too, tend to concentrate on the fast moving, current titles. They differ primarily in giving customers a little more of a feeling of being in a book "land" rather than being in the book "zone" of a vast area. The average chain store compares favorably with a good many independent shops but that is more because of the faults of the latter than because of the virtues of the former and, perhaps even more, because of the much larger capital that the chains have to spend.

The greatest variations, as is only to be expected, are among the personal bookshops. These range in size from many two- and three-man shops to a small number that have ten or more employees. They include some that are run without much knowledge and understanding and some that are the best in the industry. Many differ from each other only in the personality of the owner and his staff. It is in the independent stores that the customer will get personal attention and care. In the better ones, the stock carried, the books featured, the fixtures, the attitude of the employees and the tone established by the owner in various other ways bespeak a character that sets such stores above any department or chain store. In some of these shops is found the full world of books, a wide selection of current titles plus a good range of the best that is in print in the various fields the store tries to represent. The owner's first concern is to make a profit, but he has a regard for books as such. Furthermore, he can actually operate much more efficiently than the book department

or the chain store. Personal management makes unnecessary a great deal of the red tape and the systems that must accompany the more complex organizations. As these systems become more and more costly, the individual owner can better meet the problem of handling the vast number of titles and, other things being equal, is less driven by the economics of the situation to rely on best-sellers to the same degree. This does not mean that the individual stores will do more business than the others. There are too many other factors such as capital available, advertising, locations of department stores, etc., that must be considered. It does mean that more and more, the best stores, qualitatively, will be found among the personal bookshops. This is likely even though the well-stocked personal bookshops as a group may decline in number. There will continue to be some run by people who love and know books, who know business and who have enough sense and courage not to be stampeded by the conventional ideas of bookselling.

Regarding paperback stores, for a time it seemed that new shops were opening every day, many of them in unexpected places. One of the best features of this boom was that many new outlets were opened by young people—a development which gives promise of new blood and new ideas for an industry which needs both very badly. These new stores are capitalizing on a new market which has opened up and which is bound to keep increasing. They are also profiting from the same psychological appeal that helped make the “five-and-ten-cent stores” so successful. Certainly customers who shied away from the traditional hardcover bookstores have responded to these new paperback outlets in a way that indicates that book buying could become a national habit. In many areas, these stores offer something else new, the significance of which has still not been thoroughly understood by the trade. They base their appeal on a stock aimed at customers who buy to *read* rather than those who buy to give gifts. The relative absence of the best-seller influence is very healthy. So, too, is the absence of price cutting.

Some of the excitement that attended the early days of the paperback outlets has been dissipated and the increase in number of these outlets is continuing at a much slower rate. This is partly because the vacuum that originally existed has been filled to a certain extent. In addition, it has become clear that these stores also demand a great deal of work if they are to be run properly. Many of those that have been established were opened with too little capital, and the owners soon found themselves en-

meshed in problems of stock and operation. There has been some talk that firms in other lines have been considering opening up chains of paperback stores. Apparently these companies were discouraged by their investigations into the complexities of the business. The Rugoff theater chain did open a pilot store with some fanfare in the Times Square area. It was sold shortly after and is now independently owned and run.

It must be kept in mind that the bookstores selling hardbound books were opening or expanding their paperback sections even before the first purely paperback store was opened. The trend is toward their increasing their paperback stock more and more. Aside from the difficulties of finding the required space, this is a logical development from a cultural and business standpoint. It can lead to the establishment of large bookstores that would be economically more viable in today's world. It would also mean that the public would be able to see what was available in both hardcover and paperback. This is particularly important in view of the fact that almost all books are first published in cloth and that the economics of publishing make this certain to continue to be the case for some time.

A retail business depends so much on the person who runs it that it is important to consider what store owners are like in certain respects. One of the brilliant young men in publishing has told me that, in his opinion, they are mostly "idiots." Booksellers would probably respond by saying that they certainly are—for staying in a field where they are so ill-treated. Booksellers as a rule are hard-working, dedicated, and competent operators of retail stores. Their limitations lie in the kinds of stores they are running. There is only a small percentage who are in the field because they originally had a strong desire to be involved with books. In most cases, they are booksellers as the result of chance, or because it seemed a nice business, or represented progress from a former line, or could be entered without much capital. They are not, as I have said, particularly "bookish." Their stores largely reflect their own tastes and attitudes—or the lack of them. The intellectual bookseller can understand and place in proper perspective the "popular" works that come and go. The man whose level of taste is the "best-seller" is much less likely to develop a rounded stock. The good personal bookshops that exist show what is possible even under the present trying circumstances if there is sufficient knowledge and desire to explore the potential market. Much more could be done along these lines if the industry were not so small that it tends

to attract people who have limited capital and limited imagination and aggressiveness. These people tend to accept things as they are and do not question the conventional ideas about their trade. Their attitudes are reinforced by the fact that the big people in the industry, the publishers, accept and propagate the same outworn and stultifying approaches.

I have been using the term "booksellers" to refer to owners and managers or to the executives of large firms. It is only in the literal sense that the term can be applied to more than a small percentage of the clerks. Since the Depression, when even a low-paying job was to be treasured, the professional book clerk has been disappearing. Ideally, it should take several years for a man to get a good grounding in the wide range of available books, to say nothing of learning other aspects and tools of the business. However, most clerks stay in the business only a few years. In the course of a round table panel on this matter at an American Booksellers Association convention, the manager of one of the oldest bookshops in the country told how she brought in people from abroad who were anxious to come to the United States. It didn't help, she said; as soon as the agreed-on time was put in, the imported employees left just as promptly as the native ones did. This is, of course, unfortunate for the customer, who too often finds clerks who do not know very much and who do not care very much. At a recent discussion of the best-seller lists in a meeting of the New York Area Booksellers Association, one owner said that booksellers need the lists because without them, the clerks would not know what to recommend. This was said in all seriousness and was so taken by the others present. Especially when he has to replace a good man, the owner may wonder why he is in the business. When this happens he is forced to assume much more of the burden of "working the floor" than he should. The more he is tied up this way, the more promotion and the developing of new ideas suffer.

Given all the reasons for this state of affairs, it is surprising that there is even a small percentage of very good and very conscientious clerks. Bookstore people should have a college education or an equivalent in informal learning plus a feeling for books, and these generally are found only among people of above-average intelligence. What about the 22-year-old college graduate considering the possibilities of such an occupation? First of all, he will have no conscious or unconscious feeling of prestige in taking such a position; rather he will be aware that he will be considered an underpaid clerk. There will be no sense of professionalism as

there is in some countries where a beginner must undergo a bookselling apprenticeship which serves to give a dignity to his calling. There will be a very limited future because the field is so small and gives little indication of immediate growth. While the hours are gradually conforming to those in other lines ( $37\frac{1}{2}$  to 44 hours a week, depending on the area), they are still bad hours since they may include Saturdays or nights. Topping all this is something that would probably kill the idea completely. College degree or no degree, the bookstore clerk would be likely to start at a salary of \$50 to \$60 a week. After he gets experience and is considered a good, trained man, he may earn between \$70 and \$90. At \$100 he is going very well and is, in all likelihood, an assistant manager or a manager. At \$125 he is certainly doing better than all but a small number that includes department store buyers, chain executives, larger college store managers and assistants to owners of some of the bigger personal shops. Is it any wonder that the chain bookstores in New York are said to be largely staffed by actors "in between" engagements? Most staffs are made up of women who have no other specialized training, people who need work for a few months or a few years before going into other fields or while trying to write or paint, those who for various reasons just don't fit into other jobs and those who are at a stage where they don't know what they want to do. In this last group can sometimes be found men who have adjusted their lives to a relatively low financial return and who find in dealing with books a satisfaction that keeps them in the field. Even among those passing through, there is often to be found that pride and pleasure that animates those who stay. It is a hopeful portent that higher wages, even if not entirely commensurate with general standards for college men, may lead to an enhancement of bookselling as a career. There is also a possibility that employees may be found among the growing number of educated Negroes. There are two working for us at the moment, and, needless to say, they are as good as the rest of our staff.

The troubles that stem from the work or the workers are as nothing compared to those that arise from the destructive nature of the competition retailers must face. First, they have their own suppliers to contend with. Some publishers will not sell retail at all. Others will not try to get orders but will fill the unsolicited ones that come to them. There is more and more of a movement in the trade, however, toward the direct selling of choice books. If this were done in such a way as to let the public know



it could buy the books at the stores, I doubt that there would be much objection. Considering the limited number of outlets around now, there is some justification for this type of selling. In most cases, however, the books are offered to the customers long before the stores have stock and even, at times, before the stores know about the offer. Moreover, the ads are often written in a way that implies that the book must be ordered direct or that there is a special pre-publication price that can only be obtained from the publisher. When stores are mentioned, it is usually done as a passing reference or in small type, as though this reference were added only to comply with some unwanted requirement. Every bookseller has had customers say, "I wish I had known I could have gotten it from you."

The effect of book clubs has been argued for many years. As originally conceived, the clubs may or may not have been good for the trade (not to speak of their impact on American reading taste). The changes in the past decade, however, undoubtedly have had a pernicious effect on booksellers. There are now clubs catering to almost every interest, from business to the occult. They offer not only their regular selections but also a much larger list of so-called alternates at prices or with bonuses that a retailer cannot match. More and more backstock titles which should be bread and butter for the stores may be purchased this way, in printings identical with those sold at retail. The list goes from "Ideal Marriage" to e. e. cummings. This is a far cry from the original concept of a limited number of new titles selected by judges and printed in special book club editions. It is an ordeal for a retailer to read the most commercially important of all the book review sections, that of the *New York Times*. In the April 21, 1963 issue, for example, more than 130 titles are offered by six clubs with bonuses for new members such as "Any 4. . . All for \$1" to "All 5 Volumes, Retail \$24.75, FREE." This is hardly calculated to inspire consumer confidence in the retail stores.

If the display ads in the *Sunday Times Book Review* are disturbing, the classified ones could give a retailer ulcers. In the same issue of April 21 are six ads offering any book by mail at 25 to 30% off, plus postage; textbooks, 10% off. The firms engaged in this are the scavengers of the trade. Working out of offices or homes, with little or no stock, they siphon off a good deal of business from stores that spend money for rent and sales help and for stocking, displaying and "selling" books, and giving proper

service to customers. It is a disgrace that these companies which perform none of the obligations of bookstores should have the privilege of buying at the price given bookstores.

Almost as immoral and much more destructive is the price-cutting that is centered in New York but has been spreading throughout the country. This started from the competitive struggles of department stores first with one another and now with the discount houses. Discounting obviously makes no sense in a field where profits have been small, unless it would lead to an increase in volume great enough to make up for the lower margin and/or there could be increased efficiencies in the operation of the outlets. From the nature of books and the motivations of bookbuyers, there is no reason to believe that a cut of 20%, as an example, will generate the more than 100% increase in business that would be needed to make up for the loss in margin. I have examined the sales figures of the department stores since price cutting began to flourish and have found no appreciable rise in their over-all book sales in the New York area. As for efficiencies of operation, they have been achieved (but to an insufficient degree) by a limitation of stock and services that is antithetical to the best interests of the publishers, authors and bookbuyers, unless all three were to restrict themselves to the fast selling books. Publishers and authors, as much as some of them might wish, cannot so narrow their output. There are some book customers who buy only the best-sellers; but the trade can hardly live on them, nor do they represent a majority of the customers. The fact is that discount book departments, with few exceptions, operate at a loss or on unsatisfactory profit margins. Why do they continue to do so? Years ago, Bloomingdale's said in an ad, "The practice of selling a nationally known branded item at a loss to create the impression that all the things in a store are equally low in price is a trick as old as retailing itself."

Since discounting has made the book sections less profitable, it has led to a steady decline in their quality, which today is shockingly low. They have been treated more and more like stepchildren, being given poorer space, less personnel and less attention. Meanwhile, the chains and independent stores have lost much "cream," those fast sales of books easy to get from wholesalers. It is this "cream" which is important for the raising of salaries, and a greater profitability of the business that might lead to expansion and the attraction of new capital. In 1962 I was told by an executive of a large chain that because of this situation it had opened

eight fewer stores on the East Coast than it originally planned. It is impossible to calculate how much more growth in the business has been lost.

As long as price-cutting and loss leader selling continue to an appreciable extent, it weakens the stores in existence and discourages the opening of new outlets. The *sine qua non* for the fullest development of the book trade is the elimination of these practices. Until the publishers, writers and everyone interested in our nation's cultural welfare and the economic potential of the trade-book business speak out, things will go on the same way. With all these groups working together, various possibilities could be explored even if, as is said, a general fair trade law is unlikely. Bookstores and publishers get special mail rates because of the importance of books in the nation's life. It has been suggested that there could be special legislation based on the same theory, for protection of the industry.

The establishment of fair competitive conditions that allow a proper profit for the advance of the book business is not enough to guarantee that the advance will take place. It is also necessary to put an end to the shibboleths which have dominated the retail business for many years. Despite the many changes that have taken place, there seems to have been no re-evaluation of the business in many, many years. The prevailing beliefs still include the following basic principles:

1. A bookstore cannot afford high rent.
2. It is almost impossible to exist without sidelines.
3. The American public does not read, and is not interested in serious books; business must be based chiefly on current titles.
4. Rent and other costs make it impractical to stock slow moving titles and very much backstock.

These ideas are still accepted although the best bookshops in the country do not follow them. This doesn't disturb the "true believers" who label all these successful stores "exceptions." In most industries it would be the successful outlets that would be studied for their secrets. If these secrets were examined, it would be revealed that all these stores have a similar basic approach, adjusted to their markets and to the tastes and interests of the owners. This would apply, for example, to such places as ours in Greenwich Village, Phillip's in Cambridge, Francis Scott Key in Georgetown, and Pickwick Book Shop in Los Angeles.

The belief that sidelines are necessary has been weakened by the advent of the paperback stores. Nevertheless practically all the new general bookstores listed in recent issues of *Publishers' Weekly* carry other items. I

don't mean that sidelines are not wise in many cases, but they are not something that should be assumed necessary as a matter of course. There is so much available in the world of books that good bookstores never have enough room. When you introduce other items in a shop, you create a split character. This not only reduces the stock offered, it weakens the store atmosphere. This latter factor may be intangible but it has a very definite effect that is not sufficiently appreciated. The split character has another great weakness. Clerks who like to sell books seldom are interested in or want to know anything about cards or toys or stationery. If they have to be involved with these other items, it will be more difficult to get clerks and to keep them. Owners, too, are affected. I have had a number of them say to me that they disliked handling cards and would love to get rid of them but were afraid. Recently, there has been a trend toward eliminating some of the sidelines in favor of paper editions. This is one of the most hopeful changes and will, I believe, become more and more common.

The possibility of growth in the retail book business is still discounted in the trade and by outside observers with the oft-heard remarks that Americans are not bookbuyers or readers and that there is little interest in serious books. This has been clearly disproved by the paperback revolution. It is a paradox that store after store that did not go in for serious books "because you could not sell them except in places like Greenwich Village" carry and feature paperback titles of the highest quality and scholarly nature. It is significant that the major mass-market paperback firms have largely given up their lurid covers and low editorial standards and that a growing percentage of their titles could fit into the "quality" lines. That the importance of this has never been thoroughly examined is partly because of the limitations of booksellers and the failure of publishers to evaluate their business in the light of these facts. The publishing trade is still concentrating on the search for the best-seller and the book club choice. The so-called "popular" book as well as other current titles are very important but not to the point of disregarding those of permanent value. With a few exceptions, little emphasis is placed on getting stores to keep backstock titles. Salesmen talk almost exclusively of current titles. Advertising money is spent almost entirely on current titles. Firms have been working in this way so long that it is difficult for them to think of changing. An example of what could be done, even to a

limited degree, is Harper's consignment plan. Harper picked out over 100 titles which it felt stores should keep on hand and offered them on consignment. This has worked out very well, and many stores that tried the titles, even though they felt they couldn't be sold, have found that, like the trade generally, they had underestimated the market.

It is a curious thing that while more and more is said about the importance of a business image and more and more money is spent to create one, stores are being analyzed and evaluated in terms of their parts. On this basis little attention is given the backstock on the assumption that it cannot move fast enough to pay for the space devoted to it. There is no question that current books will turn over more quickly, though I doubt if the ratio in a well-stocked shop is as disproportionate as it is generally accepted to be. There is, however, a limit to the space that can be given the new titles without the turnover becoming smaller. The shelves devoted to the permanent items, therefore, should be analyzed in terms of the productivity of the footage that is left after the most prominent area is used for the new books. This productivity cannot be measured by direct sales alone. It must be considered in the light of the image it creates for the store and the concomitant effect on total business. Joseph Friedlander, of the City College Bernard Baruch School of Business Administration, speaking before a recent Doubleday-NYU seminar, referred to "the power of an item to 'push itself off a shelf and its power to pull a customer into a store.' Stocked together, items also act on each others' pulling powers. It is, therefore, important to view the assortment as a whole. . . ." I am convinced that if we turned one half of our store over to greeting cards or another sideline, our book business would drop to less than half of what it is even though the books eliminated might be the slowest movers.

The records of Kroch's and Brentano's in Chicago and of the new Doubleday store on New York's Fifth Avenue provide outstanding examples of bookshops that can pay high rents and that have a market larger than the trade will credit. This was even more vividly demonstrated when two young men, who had not been in the business very long, leased a very large place in the Times Square section. They planned to open a paperback store with a small hardbound selection. The rent at such a location is extremely high. They were told again and again by people in the trade that a bookshop there could not possibly do the

business required by the rent. They were even advised by some very knowledgeable salesmen to sell their lease before opening. Disregarding all warnings, they opened the store and it is a success.

There will always be room for small stores which are knowledgeable and give good service to their customers. Nevertheless, whatever hope there is for progress in the trade depends on an attitude and an economic atmosphere that will lead to larger establishments than have heretofore been the rule. The nature of the business today, with the increasingly large number of paperback titles, demands and makes possible large size. This in turn can mean that more people and more capital can be attracted to the business, that the owner can perform his necessary job as an executive instead of being tied down to the details of management, and that there will be more opportunity and more pay for clerks. This is a possibility, but it is hardly a probability unless the entire book industry stops thinking in terms of what the business has been and starts thinking in terms of what it is and what it could be.

*The American Public Library:  
The People's Reading Center  
and University*

THE YEAR 1963 was one of greatest importance to American libraries, for this was the year when our libraries came of age in the sense that they were recognized for the first time in a Congressional message by a President of the United States.

In his message on education, sent to the Congress early in 1963, President Kennedy stated, "Education is the keystone in the arch of freedom and progress. For the individual, the doors to the schoolhouse, to the library and to the college lead to the richest treasures of our open society."

The National Education Improvement Act of 1963 holds great promise for those who use libraries, whether school, college or public, because for the first time federal funds are recommended for the purchase of resource materials and for the use of non-rural public libraries. To enrich the libraries of this country, to encourage the formation of systems of public libraries and to develop academic libraries, this bill, together with the attitude of the Administration, gives great promise for the future in terms of more rapid development of all types of libraries. With such growth it goes without saying that the great resources of this country will be made more readily available to an American public that is reading more books than ever before. The American public library has a great role to play and this is worthy of comment and study.

A recent article by Henry T. Drennan\* points out a number of factors relating to the growth of the American public library. In 1939, there were

\* Henry T. Drennan, "Costs of Public Library Service," *Library Trends*, April 1963, 11: 362-375.

6,909 public libraries; in 1961 there were 8,250 public libraries in operation. Today, 10% of the total number of these libraries serve 65% of the total population of the United States and account for nearly 85% of all expenditures for public libraries. 89% of the total population is now residing in areas with local public library service. During the 1939-61 period there was an increase of 102% in population of the local governments furnishing these services and in the same period public library expenditures rose from \$48,562,000 to \$285,567,000, or an increase of 488 percent.

Two other sets of figures were reported as follows:

1939 average operating expenditures	\$ 8,500
1950   "           "           "	18,000
1961   "           "           "	42,000
1939 average population served per unit	13,600
1950   "           "           "	25,000
1961   "           "           "	27,000

A number of factors are important here: inflation, increased communication and ease in reaching libraries, development of systems of libraries, increased urbanization, and a general strengthening of library services.

It is interesting to note the increased role of the state government in the financing of libraries. Since 1939 state expenditures have risen from approximately \$270,000 to \$25,100,000 in 1961. The combined expenditures of state and local funds have risen 537 percent, while during 1942-1959 expenditures for general education rose 415 per cent.

Although the per capita expenditures for books has increased for public libraries serving populations of 100,000 or more (\$.21-.25) it has decreased for libraries serving a population 50,000-99,999 (\$.22-.21) and for those libraries serving 35,000-49,999 (\$.26-.24) in recent years. But even the increase for the larger cities is offset by a decline in the purchasing power and the 25 cents is worth only 20.6 cents, or less than the amount in 1955. Budget increases have been more substantial in the area of salaries and other operating costs than in the development of the library book and book related resources. It is now estimated that the U.S. public libraries serving cities and counties of 35,000 population or more expended for book purchases alone in 1960 an amount in excess of \$27,200,000. With the sharp increase in the number of titles published (from 10,027 in



1930 to 16,448 in 1962), coupled with the fact that the costs for new titles, new editions and reprints are on the rise (the index figure having gone from 100 in 1949 to 164.3 in 1962), it is inevitable that expenditures for book purchases will go up. At the moment, this rise in appropriations for book materials is not always apparent and some libraries are adding fewer books than heretofore. Within library budgets the allocation of funds has dropped from 18% for library materials in 1939 to 15.7% in 1956. Too often book budgets have been raided to meet other needs, or they have not been increased proportionately to meet new fiscal requirements.

The increased use of public libraries has been significant. A total of 205,279,000 volumes were circulated for home use in the city and county libraries in 1939. By 1960 this figure had grown to 54,706,000, an increase of 121% over the 1939 figures, and there are no signs of abatement at the present time. The heavier increase seems at the moment to be in the field of adult reading, which of course includes the high school student.

What of the future? The most exciting and significant development will come, and it is already apparent, in the development of systems of libraries and in increased fiscal support of these systems (including the great metropolitan libraries) by the state and federal governments.

The urbanization of great areas of the country will call for a re-study of library services in the many metropolitan areas throughout the country. There are now 212 Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas as defined by the Bureau of the Census.

In 1960 the Bureau of the Census defined these areas as one or more central cities of 50,000 or more persons, the balance of the county or counties containing such a city or cities and such contiguous counties as, by certain criteria, are essentially metropolitan in character and are socially and economically integrated with the central city. These areas present intriguing opportunity for library development, for taken as a whole, they present better and more complete characteristics than does the single metropolitan city. Many of these areas are rich in libraries, resources and library services. These Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas contain 63 percent of the population and by 1980 will contain a population of 170,000,000 or 70 percent of the total population of the country. Furthermore, it is estimated that approximately 80% of the population in 1980 will be living in urban areas, *i.e.* in communities of 10,000 or more population.

With 70 percent of the country's population living in these 212 areas by 1980, it is obvious that in order to supply the reading needs of this many people, new cooperative library programs relating to the organizing, the financing and the service programs of these libraries will be called for. Students at both the secondary and higher education levels use all libraries interchangeably. High school libraries, college and university libraries, and public libraries are used by students to locate and secure the materials needed in their work. Students at all levels are using their public libraries extensively. Some authorities place student use as high as 60-65% of the total number of people using the public library. Indeed many librarians and adults are concerned lest the adult reader and resource be crowded out by the student.

It is a patchwork business, as each one of the types of libraries mentioned has some kind of inadequacy. It may be lack of resources such as periodical, serial and newspaper files; a dearth of materials in foreign languages; lack of older as well as contemporary materials; insufficient quantities of duplicate copies of specific titles, and the list could be increased.

The individual reader often doesn't care *where* he goes to get his material as long as he can *get* what he wants. With the expected concentration of population in the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, there is a possibility for the establishment and payment of services for all readers in the area through the use of the many public and private libraries. Through cooperative acquisition of resources, union library catalogs (in card or in book form), paid inter-library loan services, state and federal subsidies, and the establishment of Metropolitan Area Library Councils, much can be done to improve total library services for all readers.

A great deal has already been started to insure the development of total library service. Illinois is in the midst of a year's study to determine library needs and legislation to meet that need. New legislation has been enacted in California; Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania and other states are now perfecting statewide systems of libraries authorized under legislation enacted in the last few years. The Pennsylvania plan, with the development, through the voluntary affiliation of local libraries, into a system of libraries that will bring public library service to the entire state, is in operation. Three levels of library service are called for under the Pennsylvania plan. The first level represents ready access by each citizen to local library service; the second level establishes up to thirty

district libraries for more comprehensive services within a convenient distance; and the third level consists of four regional resource centers, for research materials and highly specialized services, located within a day's round trip for the researcher. The law provides for no controls over these libraries other than the establishment of minimum standards relating to book resources, staff and other library matters. It will be a few years before some of these libraries will be so well developed that the entire state will have complete and adequate coverage, before the library resources will be sufficient, and before the number and quality of the staff will meet standards. Where there were no local libraries, college and university libraries have been designated as district library centers, thus insuring the plan going into operation. But the plan is now in operation and state funds are playing an important part. To qualify for aid, each local library must within a specified time raise locally \$2.00 per capita or one-half mill on the real market value, whichever is the less. State aid is in the form of up to 25¢ per capita to each qualifying and applying local library; up to 25¢ per capita for each person in a district living outside the district libraries' local taxing area; and up to \$100,000 annually for each regional resource library. Annual state appropriations have increased from \$365,300 to \$2,238,313. It is expected that state funds for library purposes will exceed \$4,000,000 annually within the next two years.

Two more steps are important before Pennsylvania will have total library service. Statewide programs to improve the school libraries in the state and a plan for the development and coordination of college, university and special libraries are called for, and progress is being made here. Although federal funds are at present restricted to rural areas under 10,000 population, it is hoped that they will be released in future legislation for use in the larger units of service, which after all do help the smaller communities through the use of both library materials and advisory services in the larger centers.

This country is definitely moving, more slowly than some people would like, perhaps, toward the development of systems of public libraries and the coordination of all library resources and services. This will come about through the increasing use of state and federal funds, and one day will make possible a complete form of library service for all.



# 5

## The Mass Media of Print

of all the media of print, the mass media, by their very nature, reach the largest audiences. Correspondingly, their opportunities, their budgets, and their responsibilities to the public are greater. Mass circulation can lead to mass taste: Is this a "good" (*i.e.* "unifying") development for the nation, or is it a "bad" (*i.e.* "leveling") effect on the national culture?

Donald Fine, writing about mass-marketed paperback books, celebrates the diversity of output from paperback publishers. Diversity added to availability, he feels, will make the "American reading public" and the entire American public one and the same.

Herbert R. Mayes similarly celebrates the "big" American magazines—their colorful past and the infinite diversity of their future. (Mr. Mayes' article is based on a speech which he gave April 16, 1963, before the Chicago Headline Club.)

Leo Bogart, looking at newspaper publishing in the age of television, adds up a few losses, many more gains and new prospects in the "revolution in the media of our time."



D O N A L D F I N E

## *Mostly on Paperbacks: A Little Light, a Little Heat*

WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, notably Dan Lacy's lucid sketch of the economics of book publishing, the contributors to this volume seem to be speaking more to themselves than to the American reading public, which is their audience and their meal ticket. This fascination with self, with private, insular woe, is also, it seems to me, the chief cause of the conditions that evoke their laments. Gloom, doom are pervasive.

One gentleman contemplates what he calls the great American whale (unwashed, doubtless) and holds little hope for its awakening unless a few select publishers learn to ignore profits and concentrate on the weal of an undefined (and undefinable) elite. Presumably the benefits to those who can appreciate them will trickle down to the whale public, but one has the impression that he really couldn't care less. Another writer suggests that so-called quality paperbacks make little sense financially in terms of average printings of 10,000 copies, and, of course, he is right. The notion that more copies might be printed and sold of books in this median price range seems obvious—but it does rest on careful and enlightened selection of titles plus imaginative sales and distribution. Still another contributor seems glad we have paperbacks but wishes we didn't, because they presumably undercut the attraction and sales of his more expensive hardcover books. He says he is pleased to receive the profits from reprint sales of his books to what he considers fat-cat paperback houses who, he is sure, publish his books as "loss-leaders." He may be amazed to know that paperback houses have no interest in loss-leaders, for prestige or otherwise. They have, however, discovered the astonishing fact that people are more likely to buy a book for 75 cents or even \$1.95 than, say, \$6.95. And this bit of economic

razzle-dazzle actually can make money for even a benighted paperback publisher who earns and profits as he renders a service to the reading public. It is also true that in some cases the paperback edition stimulates the sales of the hardcover edition. This is particularly true of reference works in paper which the reader decides he would like in a more permanent hardcover format.

Bookstores, we also learn, are near expiring. They aren't getting their fair share of new markets and the old market is dissolving away into mail-order, book clubs, supermarkets, discount chains, etc. Some of this is surely inevitable, but the process is hardly impeded by the bookstore tradition of untrained and underpaid clerks who rarely read the books they sell and who work under rather intolerable conditions. Other countries, such as the Scandinavian, make bookselling a profession. In this country it too often is a sort of raffish, genteel route to poverty for the well-spoken and highly exploitable. Trained and intelligent clerks might be the answer, but publishers would have to care enough to see that clerks make a reasonable income under decent working conditions. Do they care?

If the above seems harsh, it is because one suspects a great many people both inside and outside the book trade are weary of complaints from editors and publishers who are making more money and having more fun under more pleasant conditions than 99 percent of the population. As has been mentioned elsewhere in this volume, the romance of the book publishing business is not a myth; books are indeed still the product of the purest form of capitalism remaining in this country. They are still relatively exempt from the pressure of advertisers, crack-pots and special-interest groups. A man with a manuscript, a printer who believes sufficiently in its sales potential to produce it on credit, and a couple of good connections can still get a book published and make money. Money helps; money is even indispensable for the big operation. But without a good writer and an imaginative editor and/or publisher all the money in bookdom won't make a best-seller. Authors as well as editors and publishers would do well to remember this; money poured into advertising, promotion and publicity can't and won't make people pay 35 cents, not to mention \$4.95, for a book they don't want to read. A few may be gulled in the first instance, but their reverse word-of-mouth will eventually have its effect.

This dependence of success on quality and reality strikes me as both a



challenge and an opportunity. It is a unique advantage which book people have over, say, manufacturers of cigarettes and toothpaste; these poor fellows must forever tell the public that their product is somehow different from the competition while knowing all the time that it isn't. Every book *is* different; it is up to the publisher to let the potential reader know how and why. Too often the publisher does precisely the opposite—and I include paperback with hardcover—by telling the reader that a new book is just like one by the company's most recent bestselling author or is a retread of the author's most recent bestselling book. Sometimes it works; but more often it backfires and it deserves to.

The paperback publisher is hardly immune to many of the criticisms of his hardcover brethren. In the last fifteen years prices of paperback books have steadily mounted until the 25-cent book is now history; the 35-cent book is usually a 160-page volume that the publisher is sure can't bring a cent more even with bulk paper; and the average price per title is 50 cents and going up. As with hardcover publishers, the high costs of printing and distribution account for much of this price escalation. But also responsible is the tendency among paperback publishers to follow the leader in raising consumer prices to any level they think the market will stand; this may be the point where economics leave off and short-sighted profit-making takes over. Hardcover publishers have played an important role in the rising cost of paperback books. Hardcover houses increasingly have pegged the price of reprint rights at "what the traffic will bear." The defense has been and continues to be that nobody forces a paperback reprint house to pay what it may consider an inflated guarantee for a hardcover book. Fair enough, except that this rather short-sighted approach has also given rise to the original paperback book and the trend of paperback houses investing in hardcover houses. Such trends complicate life for everybody in the book business, but the spirit of healthy competition may well produce more good books at lower prices—and the winners can only be the writer and reader, who, after all, make winners and losers of all publishers.

Better books at lower prices for more people is still the answer to the ills of the book business. And despite the increase in the consumer price of the average paperback book, that price almost never goes above 95 cents (in the so-called mass-market paperback field) and usually is no higher than 75 cents. This is a price level which nearly every reader can afford. Moreover, within this price range the reader may secure a stagger-

ing diversity of reading—everything from westerns to Plato, from Spillane to Henry James.

Such variety of offerings is possible in inexpensive paperbacks because, with all their failings, paperback publishers have dared to take chances, to think and imagine and be creative on a rather impressive scale. They have at least partially abandoned their own clichés of category publishing—westerns, sex-and-suspense, boudoir historicals—and have enriched their lists with classics, works in the social sciences, psychology, avant-garde literature, etc. Equally important, they have diversified their methods of distribution and expanded the number of their sales outlets in an effort to keep pace with their editorially diversified lines. More and more 35-75-cent books are being sold by specially trained salesmen to secondary schools and colleges, to chain stores, to bookstores, to department stores, and to the U.S. Information Agency for readers abroad.

But what about the promising, perhaps rather “special,” new writer? Does he have any place in the supposedly impersonal operations of mass-market paperback publishing? The answer is that writers such as Joan Williams, Joe Heller, Harold Brodkey, Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud, to name a few, have all been published in inexpensive paperback editions with average printings of about 150,000 to 250,000 copies per title; and, notably in the case of Joseph Heller’s “Catch-22,” the printings have gone over one million. These writers have all enjoyed fine reviews in their perhaps more chaste hardcover incarnations, but few if any achieved a broad, diversified readership in cloth. It is this function that the paperback has performed, and it has been possible at least in part because these authors’ books were sold with some attempt to present story over cachet, to take the snob off the rose and to let a book appeal on its own terms rather than depend on the endorsement of reviewers, literary critics and scholars. It is useful to remember that William Faulkner, for example, became a commercial and household name only after his publication in inexpensive paperback editions. J. D. Salinger’s works are but another example. Similarly for many other distinguished novelists who now enjoy a readership that appreciates their work for what it is, not for what somebody says it is.

Such diversified, selective publishing and distribution of inexpensive paperbacks has put a new face on the paperback industry. The old concept of “mass-market” publishing—always a vague and ill-defined term—has been refined and drastically altered. Books are still distributed to

some 750 wholesale agencies which in turn service and supply some 92,000 retail outlets throughout the country. But increasingly the major wholesalers have chosen to set their own orders rather than merely accept whatever the publisher may want the agency to take. Initial orders and, hence, initial printings are, except for major best-sellers, generally smaller than before, but reorders based on actual consumer demand are on the increase. This would seem a much more rational procedure than unsolicited shipments: returns from dealers and wholesalers to publishers are reduced; each book can be considered more carefully by the wholesalers in terms of specialized markets; and more specialized books for special markets can be published profitably. The cost of distribution is increased, of course, by numerous smaller shipments. But profitable back-lists become more possible with frequent reorders spaced out over a period of years. And it is this reorder business that makes room for better books which sell respectably over the years rather than in a rush of the first three to four months, which once was the average strong sales period for paperback books.

Some may question whether such new trends in paperback publishing and distribution are worth the increased costs. The rationale, though, seems irrefutable: to reach more, and in more depth, the remaining vast, untapped readership in this country. Publishers—paperback and hardcover alike—will see this readership grow, and they, too, will grow when they finally convince themselves that the *whole* American public is, at least potentially, the American reading public.

## *Reflections—on the Magazine Past, on the Magazine Future*

A MAGAZINE is an idea in the beginning, and then a man. For better or for worse, it is never a committee. The idea may be right for the time, and be superseded by another idea, not necessarily better, but more pertinent. The man may be right for the idea, and succeeded by another who neither measures up to it, nor is able to modify or adapt it to the changing world; or be succeeded by one who has the needed broader vision to keep the original idea alive, to embellish it with his own imagination, to enlarge on it with his own strength and courage and conviction.

Magazines are personal, not corporate. Magazines are men, not corporations.

In this century, of all the magazine publishing people who have come and gone, there are, in my opinion, five who are magnificent above all the others because of the contributions they have made to our country and its way of life.

Though the term "muckraking," first applied by Theodore Roosevelt, has come to acquire some degree of opprobrium, it had no such connotation when S. S. McClure, in the magazine that bore his name, first engaged in a series of investigations and disclosures of evil that fascinated and stirred his readers and subsequently brought about extraordinary reforms in industry and government. "The Shame of the Cities" by Lincoln Steffens, "The History of the Standard Oil Company" by Ida Tarbell, "The Railroads on Trial" by Ray Stannard Baker, "The Story of Life Insurance" by Burton Hendricks introduced a form of journalism that was fierce but sound, daring but constructive, uncomplicated and uncompromising. Also the man who established the first newspaper syndicate in this country, Mr. McClure, for editorial probity, for quick com-

prehension of the right story at the right moment, for disdain of convention, has had no peer. I would nominate Mr. McClure as one of the five authentic editorial geniuses of the twentieth century.

As might have been expected, *McClure's* was imitated by a dozen other publications, probably the most successful of which was *Hampton's*, which became *Hampton's Broadway Magazine*. In 1928 I went to upstate New York to visit Benjamin Hampton, as, being curious about them, I made it my business to meet most of the magazine editors of the period. On that occasion Mr. Hampton said that in his opinion the great editors of the day were Ray Long of *Cosmopolitan* and George Horace Lorimer of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Mr. Long, who approved my application for an editorial post with Mr. Hearst in 1927, who had been a great editor of *Redbook*, then of *Cosmopolitan*, ended his life with a shotgun after leaving *Cosmopolitan*. His successor on *Cosmopolitan*, Harry Payne Burton, ended *his* life with sleeping pills. An associate editor of *Cosmopolitan*, a woman whose name I forget, hanged herself. In charge of *Cosmopolitan* myself for a short period, I decided to get out before the thing became really contagious.

If any magazine can claim to have become a household name, this century, it is the *Saturday Evening Post*. Under the driving direction of Mr. Lorimer, it published the best popular fiction of its time, the most incisive articles, the most influential editorial opinion. It was a bulwark of sturdy Republicanism, the champion of American industry, varied in its program, dedicated to the standards it set, a national institution, as Mr. Lorimer himself was a national institution. I would nominate Mr. Lorimer as one of the five authentic editorial geniuses of the century.

*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* came into being in 1850, "purely as a magazine to present a selection of material first published in other magazines, both foreign and American—a one hundred and forty-four page compendium of the periodicals of the day." It was not the first basic digest idea but the first to be so specific in its intention; yet it was not until 1921, when Lila and DeWitt Wallace launched the *Reader's Digest*, that the digest formula made any lasting impact. The *Reader's Digest* is as American as the Wallaces, as broad in its interests as the people it serves. It has become the largest circulated magazine in the world; never accepting advertising until 1954, it is and has been one of the most prosperous. Imitated often, never remotely equaled, it is a phenomenon of our time, because Lila and DeWitt Wallace are phenomena, good phenomena,

and I would nominate them as a team as among the five authentic editorial geniuses of the twentieth century.

In 1923, two years after the debut of the *Reader's Digest*, Henry Luce gave us *Time*. He gave us *Life* and *Fortune*. He gave us *Sports Illustrated* which, in the face of a thousand prophets of doom, has persisted and is making its own way, on its own income, and only because of the unshakable conviction of Mr. Luce that it had a legitimate place in our scheme of things. *Time* and *Life* and *Fortune* also had a *Tide*, an advertising trade publication, which Mr. Luce subsequently sold. It also had another companion, *Letters*—composed of letters addressed to *Time* for which there was not sufficient space in that magazine—which Mr. Luce soon decided was an inappropriate venture. And, though this fact is little known, a year after Mr. Luce introduced *Time*, he acquired the *Saturday Review of Literature*, which he owned for twelve months before selling it back to its previous publishers.

The *Literary Digest*, one of the consequential publications of the day, had a remarkable publicity gimmick. Prior to each national election it sponsored a straw vote of the electorate and, until 1936, accurately predicted each outcome. However, in 1936 it forecast the election of Alfred Landon over Franklin D. Roosevelt for the presidency. It was one of two of the most incorrect forecasts in polling history, and it helped to mark the demise of the *Literary Digest*. The *Literary Digest* already had absorbed the *Review of Reviews*, *Public Opinion*, and *Current Opinion*; and in 1938 was itself absorbed by *Time*.

The founder and editor of *Time*, Mr. Luce, a man of towering stature, of formidable intellectual prowess, of unwavering determination, I would nominate as one of the five authentic editorial geniuses of the twentieth century.

If I have included no editors from the field of women's magazines, it is because all of them, to a greater or lesser degree, have pursued the pattern established by editor Sarah Josepha Hale, in *Godey's Lady's Book* in the nineteenth century. The *Delineator*, *Pictorial Review*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *McCall's* were, earlier this century, known as the Big Six. *Delineator* was merged with *Pictorial Review*. *Pictorial Review* folded. *Woman's Home Companion* folded. It was the end of an era.

The *Ladies' Home Journal* was not the original title of that magazine. It was *Ladies' Journal*. On the cover of the first several issues an illustrator

had drawn a sketch of a small-home living room, and the word *Home* appeared immediately under it. Readers assumed it was part of the magazine's name, and from that time forward it became the *Ladies' Home Journal*.

All of the early women's magazines were edited by women. When Edward Bok became editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1889, succeeding Mrs. Cyrus Curtis, his appointment was something of a sensation. Since then only one woman, Gertrude Lane, editor of the *Woman's Home Companion*, was representative of her sex in heading up a major women's publication, though Beatrice Gould, a great editor in her own right, was a partner with her husband Bruce in the running of the *Journal*.

The *Farm Journal*, which absorbed Curtis' *Country Gentleman* in 1955, was the first magazine, in 1880, to offer to make good any loss readers sustained "by trusting advertisers who proved to be deliberate swindlers." A number of magazines have followed that practice; but *Good Housekeeping*, through its guaranty seal, has made far more practical and promotional and constructive use of the guaranty than any other.

Of the existing women's magazines, *McCall's* was the first, appearing in 1870 under the title of *The Queen*, then as *The Queen of Fashion*, and finally in 1897 as *McCall's*. It was named after its founder, the Scotsman, James McCall. The *Journal* made its debut in 1883, and *Good Housekeeping* in 1885.

I believe the first store magazine was published by John Wanamaker—*Everybody's*—and it later became, under other ownership, a crusading magazine, then a magazine of general interest, and I would venture that no magazine since its time has covered more subjects, or covered them better. It was a landmark.

In the 1920's, Bamberger's, in New Jersey, one of America's great stores, began publication of *Charm*, a magnificent monthly that was distributed to its charge customers. *Charm* was taken over by Street & Smith, later by Condé Nast, and only a few years ago merged with *Glamour*.

A more important development in store distribution of magazines began in 1932, when the A. & P. stores issued every week a one-page bulletin, called *A. & P. Menus*. In 1935 this evolved into an 8-page booklet. In 1937 it became a full-fledged magazine, with the title *Woman's Day*. The first issue was free. The second issue carried a one-cent price

on some copies, a two-cent price on other copies, but actually customers received them free. Later the price was changed to three cents, and charged for, then seven cents, and finally ten cents. As a result of government involvement, this magazine was sold by A. & P. to Fawcett, which still controls it.

So A. & P. began it with its menu sheet, but it was *Family Circle* in 1932 that first appeared as an excellent home magazine, distributed by the Piggly Wiggly stores. At the beginning this, too, was given free to customers.

In 1939, the Woolworth stores entered into an agreement to sell the newly organized Tower magazines—a detective magazine, a home magazine, a romance magazine, and a children's magazine. They were sold for ten cents, and did quite well until it was discovered that the publisher, unknown to the Woolworth people, was falsifying circulation records. The owner was convicted of fraud, the Woolworth stores threw the magazines out, and that was the end of that.

Our humor magazines, after the original *Life* went into limbo along with its contemporaries *Puck* and *Judge*, included *Ballyhoo*, which achieved a circulation of two million in two years and then quickly faded, and *Hellzapoppin*, and *Hooey*. All of them were slightly sleazy, all a little in the image of *Capt. Billy's Whiz Bang*, which was the first magazine in the Fawcett shop, and all gave way to the *New Yorker*, which came into being in 1925 and remains today the finest of the witty and urbane magazines of the world.

In any consideration of publishing, it would be remiss not to refer to several external influences that have affected it beneficially. And I should like to mention some of them.

The Audit Bureau of Circulation has been in no small measure responsible for the reputation for circulation reliability that magazines have come to enjoy. Established in 1914, it is the firmest foundation we have, a citadel of strength, a checker-upper, a bulldog of a watchdog, and for all our audience studies, our pass-along, our readers per copy, nothing is quite so meaningful as the basic circulation we have, where it is, and how it got there.

Perhaps next as a constructive force was the appearance in 1919 of the Standard Rate and Data Service, which made complete circulation and rate and mechanical information available to the entire industry. The



service began as a quarterly, went almost immediately to a monthly basis, and I don't know what we would do without it.

Next I would specify the Lloyd Hall service, which analyzes monthly the editorial content of every magazine, indicating the precise lineage devoted to every editorial category and the proportion of editorial content to advertising. It presents an immediate and accurate view of what our magazines are doing, on what they are placing their emphasis, and in general how they are faring.

Because no consideration of publishing can be made without reference to advertising, I believe we must observe the first appearance of *Printer's Ink* as a contributing constructive force. On the national scene, *Advertising Age* has become the most widely read chronicler of our activities, and it has been joined by a number of local and sectional periodicals devoted to communications and advertising.

In my judgment the magazine that did most to denigrate our image was *Confidential*: not merely cheap and dirty beyond reason, but irresponsible; not merely without morals, but without the remotest semblance of decency, a calculated and deliberate purveyor of half-truths and no-truths, whose predecessor, in more dignified guise, was *Town Topics*, from which, if you paid enough, you could arrange to have excluded your name, the place you were last night where you shouldn't have been, with the girl you weren't supposed to know. It was referred to as a society magazine. It was a blackmail sheet, unpure and unsimple.

Not scandalous, but raucous, the *Police Gazette* was the most faithful of all the magazine habitués of the saloon and the barber shop. Dedicated to athletes, boxing, burlesque, in its original pink cover it was as American as corn and often as indigestible.

*Life* after it was acquired by Mr. Luce, was soon joined by *Look*, which was issued monthly before going to bi-weekly. The inside cover of the first issue said this: "*Look* has no advertising department. It accepts no advertising." Well, times have changed. So has *Look*, which has become one of our greater magazines, a credit to pictorial journalism.

*Quick*, a weekly published by the Cowles group, was the first of the miniature-size magazines. It was joined by *People Today*; and though both aroused substantial interest, their tenure was brief.

Of the big weeklies no longer with us, let us glance at *Leslie's*. This originated as a monthly magazine, was absorbed by the *American*. The

weekly itself, partly general interest, partly crusading, was absorbed by, of all things, *Judge*.

Col. Robert McCormick of the Chicago *Tribune* and Joseph M. Patterson of the New York *Daily News* brought *Liberty* into being as a weekly in 1924. Except for a magazine called *Success*, it probably had in its twenty-seven year span more different owners than any other. It never at any time was much good.

And now we come to *Collier's*. It was born as a weekly in 1888, primarily to promote the sale of Peter Collier's book business. Its first title was *Once A Week*, changed to *Collier's* in 1896, went bi-weekly in 1953, and remained on that schedule until its last issue in January 1957. No end to a great publication ever came more abruptly, or more specifically as a result of inept management. From whatever floor you view it, it had a stunning history, and I think it deserved to live.

There never was before, and hasn't been since, a publication for children like *St. Nicholas*. Of all the magazines I read as a youngster, I cherish most my memories of that lovely, lively, challenging, instructive *St. Nicholas*. It didn't fail to keep up with the times. Times changed, and standards deteriorated; not the magazine's—the public's. It is a sad commentary on our culture of that day that the comic books replaced *St. Nicholas*.

In 1946, a group of disgruntled writers, believing that their freedom of expression was being curtailed by editors, believing that they made too little money and publishers too much, determined to embark on a communal publishing career. Their first statement was that they hated bosses and would have none; would run their magazine with a committee. Thus came into being '47, *The Magazine of the Year*. It was to change its title with each succeeding year, and did—exactly once, when it appeared as '48. The committee didn't see eye to eye, or eyes to eyes, the writers found they could earn much more money elsewhere, and '48 folded. It was pretty bad. It had no reason for existence in the first place.

The first magazine for older people—the *Journal of Living*—was soon taken over by *Lifetime Living*, whose own lifetime was short. Both were bad. *Harvest Years*, the only magazine remaining in the field, now has new backing, has a long way to go editorially if it is to have a long way to go by the calendar.

I think that the *New England Homestead* was the forerunner of all

reasonably modern sectional magazines, followed by the *New England Magazine*. Most successful, enormously so, and deservedly, is *Sunset*. At first, toward the end of the last century, *Sunset* was a sort of house organ for the Southern Pacific Railroad. In the late 1920's it was acquired by the Lane family, which operates it so well today. There's not been anything like it. It is as much a part of western living as the gardens it describes, and I think it is housed in pleasanter quarters than any other publication in America.

*Encore* and the *Golden Book* were our two foremost reprint—not digest—magazines, and I never missed an issue of either.

The *Negro Digest* became the first magazine addressing itself particularly to Negroes. Its owner then introduced *Ebony*, along with other magazines, which I understand are doing very well indeed.

Bernarr Macfadden, a powerful personality, a faddist, erratic, a sensationalist, was the father of the confession magazine which, still flourishing to some extent, served a most important need and did a great deal, I believe, to interest people in reading who rarely had read before, and who learned to go on to better things. The introduction of *True Story* was a significant milestone. Newsstand sales were fantastic, and advertising response matched them. And with the rise of *True Story* came the decline of *Physical Culture*, which Mr. Macfadden had founded and which, for all his success with other properties, he continued to cherish above all the others.

One of Mr. Macfadden's odd ventures was with *Babies—Just Babies*. Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt was installed as editor. In deference to the memory of a distinguished lady, I will not dwell on its brief existence.

John Siddall, one of Mr. McClure's first associates, became editor of the *American Magazine*, built it with a success formula—the possibilities for all inherent in American business. Its fiction was happy, its articles were happy, everybody in business was happy. But the financial crash of 1929 destroyed the *American's* reason for being. It modified its formula many times after that, and died with the *Companion* and the rest of the Crowell-Collier group in 1956. Mr. Siddall—whose "Sid Says" editorials were indeed a by-word—was a great editor. The *American* in his day was a great magazine.

How does one pass by the incredibly great quality magazines: the *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, and the *Saturday Review*, still exerting their influence;

and the *Century*, *Scribner's*, the *Bookman*, the *Dial*, the *North American Review*, the *Forum*? Or those small and tenacious liberal stalwarts, the *Nation* and the *New Republic*?

How does one pass by *Flair*, which came in so bombastically and with a hole in the cover, guaranteed the best in fiction, the best in fashion, the best in reporting, the very best of everything—and lasted all of eleven issues?

How does one pass by Frank Crowninshield, who with Condé Nast gave us *Vanity Fair*, which was merged into *Vogue*? Or the *Smart Set*, first a journal for New York society, then under Henry Mencken and George Jean Nathan a magazine of cleverness for the intelligentsia?

Or *Travel*, a forerunner of *Holiday*?

Or old timers like *Read It*?

Or *Theatre*, which preceded *Show Business Illustrated*, which preceded *Show*?

Or the shelter magazines, or *Argosy* and *Adventure*, and *Pearson's*, and the *National Geographic*?

Or *Click, Pic, and See*? Or *College Humor*? And how Flannagan and Piehl made over the *Scientific American*? The growth of *TV Guide*, the rise and decline of the fan magazines?

What comes now? What about the decades ahead?

Some large magazines, as *American Heritage* has done already, will appear with hard covers; some with plastic covers. Some will be loose leaf.

There will be astonishing developments in magazine covers.

Most magazines will have perfect binding, exactly like the telephone book.

Magazines will be printed on more opaque and smoother but lighter paper; lighter paper, which is more expensive but whose lower mailing costs will represent a huge over-all economy. As mailing costs go up, paper weight will go down. And there will be substitutes for paper—good substitutes—which will come from a DuPont or a Monsanto.

There will be faster presses and shorter closing dates. There will be—there *should* be—a return of regular advertising schedules, which a publisher can depend on, on an annual basis, instead of the hand-to-mouth basis that exists today. There will be a charge for ads that come in late; there will be special late closing forms, for which there will be a premium.

There will be a reduction and quite possibly an elimination of all premium charges for bleed and for color, a trend already under way.

There will be many special annual issues of regular magazines—special issues that will sell for a dollar and more, as *Esquire* does now.

There will be envelopes attached to covers, and inside the magazines, with samples in them: samples of merchandise, swatches of wallpaper, of fabric, for example, to serve both editorial and advertising requirements.

As a few magazines have done already, some others will modify the number of issues they publish in the course of a year. It is not my opinion that publishing fewer issues because of economic necessity is a satisfactory solution to a publisher's problem. No magazine ever was economized into success, any more by putting out fewer issues than by giving the reader fewer editorial pages. Both methods have been tried before, and both have failed. There is only one reason for making a monthly bi-weekly, or a weekly bi-monthly, and that is the service that can be rendered to the reader. When you forget the reader and consider only the number of advertising pages available, you had better forget publishing. A reduction in train service keeps many people from getting from where they want to go, when they want to go, but the procedure has not yet salvaged a railroad.

Will there be more and more small magazines? Of course. Without them, I feel the outlook would be dismal because they will tread new ground, because they will provide training ground for new editors, because they will explore new territory and challenge old concepts and defy tradition. But I am constrained to add this, that there is no particular virtue in being small. Most magazines stay small because they don't deserve to be big. Their situation is somewhat akin to the advertising agencies that take considerable pride in their size, or absence of it. Once considered good enough to be tapped by a Procter & Gamble, or a General Motors, how they jump at the chance and wait breathlessly for the next annual issue of *Advertising Age* that will show how their volume has increased and how they have gone from 122nd place in billings to 103rd!

The larger magazines, I predict, will go on to genuinely great circulation. The *Reader's Digest* may and can and, I believe, will reach 20 million. Perhaps 25 million. The women's magazines and the weeklies can go over 15 million. And should. With the increase in population, with the greater emphasis on education, with the coming improvement in editorial content, magazines cannot and must not stay even approximately at their present levels.

With circulation going up, advertising rates must ultimately come

down. Frank Munsey, with his famous magazine begun in 1893, had a slogan for advertisers: A dollar a thousand. The climate was different, but we may get to that again. Not now; not tomorrow; but rates *will* go down. *I* think they will.

There will be new methods of distribution. We may find magazines delivered once a month with the subscriber's Sunday newspaper. We may find more magazines eliminating subscription sales and selling only through retail outlets. We may find some magazines sold only by subscription, confining newsstand sales to hotels and air and railroad terminals. We may find at least one consumer magazine leading the way with completely free circulation—something now anathema, but not unlikely if circulation costs continue to go up.

At the newsstands we may find magazines and paperback books sold in combination.

We may find magazine and newspaper subscriptions sold in combination.

We may find television and magazines offering combination rates to advertisers; and indeed, both media under a single ownership.

We may find several magazines sold at the newsstands for a low combination price; and not necessarily magazines owned by the same publisher, but non-competitive magazines owned by different publishers.

We need and should have a magazine for the young woman who graduates from *Seventeen* and *Mademoiselle* and *Glamour* and has nothing now to bridge the gap before she becomes interested in the women's magazines, which do not now serve the purpose. As far as I am aware, *Redbook* is the only magazine making a serious effort to get in there and pitch, and perhaps for largely prejudiced reasons I think it will score well.

I believe we will have a great art magazine—rather like the current quarterly, *Art in America*—which will sell a million copies an issue and for ten dollars a year.

I believe there will be combination advertising rates offered by different publishers of non-competing magazines. Not merely a *Post-Journal-American Home* rate, or a *Look-Family Circle* rate, but a *Life-McCall's* rate, a *Time-Saturday Review* rate, a *Better Homes & Gardens-Good Housekeeping* rate.

It is not unlikely that a major women's magazine will be published bi-weekly.

There will be—I am sure there will be—a multi-million circulation science magazine—a more popular but equally reliable version of the superb *Scientific American*.

There is bound to come—as surely as we are here together—a major magazine for older people. The time is not too far off when all the advertising emphasis is not going to be on the younger market; and one good reason is that there are going to be so many tens of millions of older people, all of whom must buy food, and linen, and soap and dentifrices, and new household equipment, and new automobiles, and who will do most of the traveling.

If no one dares to dream, there are no dreams. I dream that some day a news magazine, for special last minute news, may have a kind of facsimile transmission directly into the home. That's how *Newsweek's* "Periscope" department may be offered.

Regional editions of magazines will increase endlessly. There will be more and more splitting up and narrowing down, even to moderate city levels, in competition with newspapers and local radio and television stations.

Most of all, however, the very most important of all, the intellectual level of the magazine page will be raised. It must start now, and there is no waiting time. The vast public is ready. You can be too expensive for it but you can't be too good for it. What we produce today in the way of reading matter is not at all in a class with what was produced by our predecessors. Their magazines were better edited. Infinitely better. They offered finer fare to their readers.

Their fiction was superior. Most of our short stories today are for mush-heads. Theirs had substance, style, grandeur. They had *character*.

Their essays had polish, their biographical offerings were not about tramps and tarts but about men and women who sang and painted and explored and invented, and they were written by *writers*.

This is not nostalgia. It is not wishful thinking. The progress we have made as an industry in the last twenty-five years, and more particularly in the last five, has been altogether in the visual area. We have reached, visually, a great new plateau. So it is no longer so much with what attracts the eye as with what attracts the mind that we must make our new advances. That we have today in charge of our editorial product the editorial stature that is essential—I speak in terms of editors and their educational background, their depth of reading, their breadth of vision—

I doubt. There are among all of them no more than four who rank with Mr. McClure, with Arthur Vance, with Ellery Sedgwick, with Mr. Bok. Too many of our magazines are in the hands of editorial entrepreneurs, second rate and inferior intellectually, and not always intellectually honest. We need more giants, we are starved not merely for genius but for talent. It is time we made the agonizing reappraisal of ourselves. We are by no means what we say we are; and, more unfortunately, what we think we are. It is by no means television alone that is an intellectual wasteland. Dear God, we need writers and editors, not promoters, and somehow I think we will find them.

Magazines have come and gone this century, hundreds of them. The same is true of automobiles—hundreds have come and gone. The subject of magazine foldings has been a popular one in various quarters this past decade, and though the magazine industry often is harassed and embarrassed by it, I for one am not, because I believe fervently that no industry progresses unless certain of its elements disappear along the way and others—more dynamic, more interesting and purposeful—move in to take their place. When magazines *do* stop folding, our industry will indeed be depressed; not because all of the magazines don't live, but because some of them do.

Ours is a business of creativity. Of leading, of daring to lead, not being fearful of occasional failure. What matters is the idea, not always whether it will show an immediate profit. My favorite paragraph from all my personal reading is this: "Ideas, before they can come to fruition, must germinate. The most important direct consequence of an idea is that it gives rise to more ideas. The rewards to be realistically hoped for are the *indirect* ones, as was the case with the sons who were told to dig for buried treasure in the vineyard. They found no treasure, but they improved the soil."

I am a fanatic about magazines. I believe they will be here until the end of time. Nothing will take their place. They have much to do, and they will do it. And my hope is that when the full history of this century's publishing is written, there may be a footnote somewhere along the way saying that I loved it very much.



## *Newspapers in the Age of Television*

IN THE HISTORY of mass communication, technical changes have always had great cultural consequences. Every new medium, once past the early developmental stage which follows its invention, has disturbed the existing equilibrium of communications and has brought about a new balance of leisure time, information flow, aesthetic experience, and popular symbolism. What has this technological revolution through which we are living meant for the oldest instrument of modern mass communication, the daily newspaper?

It seems convenient to think of the public's available time and attention as a pie which the media carve up (so that the share taken by one is denied to the others); but this is an erroneous metaphor. The evidence suggests that each medium makes its own unique demands on the time and attention of the public. In fact, the media compete for time only up to a point. To some extent (as in reading and listening), they actually overlap in time. In the age of automation, the supply of time seems far less exhaustible than it appeared a few years ago. Most important, the distinctive functions of each medium for the common audience make them far less incompatible than they are often thought to be.

Of all the media, daily newspapers appear to have been least affected by the growth of television. Their circulation today is at an all-time high of over 60,000,000 copies sold each day. During television's great years of expansion, newspaper circulation has continued to increase relative to the active adult population between the ages of twenty-one and sixty-four. This increase may be explained by the rising trends in educational attainment, discretionary spending power, and the concentration of population in metropolitan areas where newspapers are published. Social scientists and social critics are customarily concerned with the press as a mass communicator of ideas. Indeed, its content is so important a part of the complex life of our time that we seldom think of newspapers as a vast

five-billion-dollar-a-year manufacturing business, employing many thousands of persons. Specifically, according to the *United States Statistical Abstract*, there are 343,000 persons employed by newspapers, an all-time high. This compares with about 93,000 employed in radio and TV broadcasting.

There is a fundamental difference between broadcasting and the press in the nature of these enterprises. An enormous capital investment in presses, in composing and engraving equipment, and in other machinery is required to keep a newspaper in business. It consumes daily prodigious and costly quantities of paper and ink. The broadcaster, by contrast, transmits electrical energy over the free airwaves. He requires but a modest plant, and much of what he broadcasts he does not have to produce; it comes off the telephone wire, records, tape, or film. Correspondingly, his manpower requirements are relatively small, both for technicians and for talent. The newspaper, on the other hand, is a complex manufacturing operation in which large numbers of people are employed. Accordingly, not only labor costs but also the intricacies of labor negotiation present far greater problems for the press than for the electronic media. Moreover, the broadcaster gets his income from a single source, the advertiser, while the newspaper publisher relies on the public as well, and his advertising rates are always in delicate balance with his subscription costs.

To view newspapers in the TV era only from the standpoint of the audience is to ignore the fact that the major impact of television on newspapers has been an economic one. Two-thirds of newspaper operating revenues are produced by advertising, and newspapers have had a declining share of all United States advertising. Since the great growth of television has coincided with a general boom in the economy and in investments in advertising, newspaper advertising billings have shown continuing growth during the same period that television has whittled out a substantial share of the total advertising appropriations. In fact, newspaper advertising revenues surpass those of television, radio, magazines, and billboards combined. The number of daily newspapers in the United States has actually been stable in the television era—1,749 in 1945, 1,760 in 1955, and the same number today. The most striking change occurred in the previous twenty years, from a total of 2,008 in 1925 and one of 1,950 in 1935.

The advertiser conventionally plans a national television advertising schedule by using a network program which includes one station in each

market. The growing emphasis on television may well have encouraged a similar tendency to build national newspaper schedules on the basis of a single paper per market in all but the few largest and most complex cities. The criterion for selecting this single paper may be the size of the circulation or the cost. But in either case, the independent use of the same criteria by many different advertising organizations might well have contributed to an increasing concentration of expenditures among the leading papers. Thus the fifth, fourth, third, or even second ranking paper in a market has in many cases faced an attrition in advertising revenues along with a steadily increasing cost of doing business.

As a result of these financial pressures, a number of big-city newspapers have disappeared in recent years through merger, sale, or other forms of discontinuance. While new daily newspapers continue to appear on the scene, only one in the last few years has appeared in a major city (Phoenix), whereas papers have merged in five big cities (Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Boston, Cleveland, and Detroit). Inevitably, if one competitive paper in a city closes down, the economic health of the survivors improves correspondingly. While the disappearance of major city dailies has raised concern, it must be considered in the light of the continued diversity in the coverage of news and expression of opinion via other mass media.

The big papers which went out of business had for the most part suffered declines in advertising linage in prior years, but their circulation had remained relatively stable. Each of these great publishing institutions continued to attract hundreds of thousands of faithful readers every day, and presumably they occupied a significant part of the daily life cycle for these readers. Their disappearance, therefore, in no way reflected a falling off of their appeal as communication media.

Once a newspaper has disappeared, the readership quickly redistributes itself to the remaining papers. In the five big cities mentioned, a comparison of circulation two years before and two years after a newspaper was discontinued shows an average drop of only about five percent. This comparative stability is particularly remarkable because a certain minority of people in any city buy *all* the papers which circulate locally—and so this factor would automatically cause a drop.

To be sure, these figures cannot be interpreted for individual markets except in relation to the over-all growth in population and family units during the same four-year period, as well as in relation to the great ecological changes in urban areas. However, it is apparent that even where the

number of choices in metropolitan newspapers is reduced from three to two, or even from four to two, the circulation of the remaining papers rises to meet all but a small proportion of the original readership.<sup>1</sup>

Although newspaper audiences remain relatively constant in size even when a big paper disappears, advertising revenues do not. Advertisers have not increased their lineage investments in the surviving papers in proportion to their former investments in the discontinued paper. Those budgets have gone into other media—or into other markets.

Daily newspapers are published in 1,460 different communities in the United States, including suburbs or the satellites of major cities. By way of comparison, there are television stations in 333 communities, and AM radio stations in 2,242. Nearly two-thirds of the population of the United States are to be found in the 212 standard metropolitan areas. In those areas, 91 percent of the population are served locally by two or more daily papers, 43 percent are served by three or more, and 30 percent by four or more. This does not express the full range of choice for the newspaper reader, because in smaller cities and towns (both within and outside of metropolitan areas) the local newspapers normally face some competition from the big metropolitan dailies. And in rural areas and small towns without a local daily, it is not uncommon to find newspapers from several nearby cities circulating locally.

All this explains why the average number of newspapers read every day by each reader is reduced only slightly as we go from cities of half a million and over (1.5 papers per reader) to other cities over 50,000 (1.4), suburbs (1.4), towns of 2,500 to 50,000 (1.3), and rural areas (1.3).<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to the national network programming (originating in New York or Hollywood) which dominates television during the evening hours of peak viewing, the newspaper remains a peculiarly local product in content and direction, in spite of the widespread use of the two major wire services and of syndicated material.

Urban industrial society is inconceivable without specialization and division of labor. Precisely as people's interests grow more diverse and disparate, the symbols which weld them into communities take on new and increased importance. The press records the life of the community and is its traditional voice. But in so far as it records the events of highly specialized interest, whether obituaries, social notices, commodity prices, or basketball scores, it also provides the indispensable means by which

individuality is maintained. No one reads every word in the paper, precisely because not every word is intended for everyone. As he scans, the reader selects the information relevant to him, and instantaneously and unconsciously he screens out what is of no use. The very comprehensiveness of the newspaper gives it its continuing vitality in the face of strong competition from the broadcast media. And it is inconceivable to duplicate this comprehensiveness or even to approach it in a time-bound medium.

With one or two notable exceptions,<sup>3</sup> the national newspaper, as known in many countries, is not a feature of American journalism. The conditions which make possible the national daily newspaper, as in England, for example, are a restricted geographic area and a technical ease in transporting papers from the metropolis to all parts of the country.<sup>4</sup> The comparatively vast distances in the United States and the historical differences in outlook among various regions have inhibited the growth of circulation on a national basis, even though papers in a number of cities (like Boston, Chicago, Des Moines, and Minneapolis) radiate influence over a large hinterland.

In four cases out of five, the paper read originates in the same county or the same metropolitan area as the reader. This "home town" character is true for big and little papers alike. Papers which broaden their news coverage of surrounding communities normally do so with the object of increasing the circulation base and thus, ultimately, the advertising revenue. However, as a paper's circulation ranges farther and farther afield, it may lose its capacity to concentrate economically on the customer zone for local advertisers in the central city. Big papers solve this problem with their sectional editions. Historically, however, there has been a close coincidence between the retail trading zone of local business and the circulation zone of the newspaper.

Since daily newspapers in the United States represent community rather than national expressions, they do not function as partisan political-party organs as leading European newspapers do. The political outlook of a paper may strongly influence the reader's choice—in those areas where competitive newspapers are published at the same time of day. But the selection of a paper may be as much or more affected by its overall editorial formula or emphasis, by its cultural tone, the quality of its reporting, the presence of particular features, or its advertising content.

Precisely because the newspaper in each community is such a mighty

local force, it may tend to attract or to develop staffs of persons whose concerns are centered on the community. The newspaperman, therefore, is likely to be a somewhat different breed from the broadcaster in the same town. The broadcaster as the protagonist of a newer, less solidly entrenched medium is not likely to have as deep roots in the community as the newspaperman. His network affiliation (which he almost surely has if he is in TV) gives him a feeling of being hooked onto the New York-Hollywood main line. A larger proportion of his revenues comes from the national advertisers than from the local merchants. Thus his orientation tends to be toward the airport and the long-distance telephone rather than toward what is going on around the corner.

The personalities of the newspaper world (editors, reporters, columnists, and writers) probably radiate less glamor today than they did several decades ago before the rise of the broadcast media. During the 1920's the play "The Front Page" typified the public view of journalism as an exciting profession whose day-to-day affairs were fraught with drama. Nineteenth-century American journalism produced some truly olympian figures: mighty editors like Greeley, whose words shaped public opinion and government policy; incisive cartoonists like Nast, who aroused public indignation and generated emotions that wrought political change; foreign correspondents like Stanley or Davis, whose personal exploits were themselves news; powerful publishers like Pulitzer and Hearst, who deployed vast resources in the competitive struggle for talent and circulation. These heroes of past generations have few counterparts in the journalism of today, at least as it exists in the popular imagination.

Today the "show business" aspect of the broadcast media is invested with glamor and color, and journalism may seem mundane by contrast. Publishing organizations are engaged in a substantial effort in schools and colleges to promote the attractions of journalism as a career, but recruitment is not as easy as it once was. The last few decades have seen a manifold growth in the market for writing and editorial skills. Not only do radio and television actively compete for the services of the journalism school graduate, but also there is a further demand from such mushrooming fields as public relations, advertising, and industrial publications. Since much of the existing demand is concentrated in the nation's few major communication centers, there is a corresponding drain on the supply of talented ambitious young people in smaller towns and cities throughout the country.<sup>5</sup>

Although the newspaper acts as the embodiment of the local community in a society characterized by complex ecological patterns and by divided personal loyalties and orientations, the experience of reading the newspaper is a nationally uniform and unifying experience. Newspaper readership in the United States has an almost universal character. In 86.4 percent of the households, one or more papers are read on the average weekday (Monday through Friday). Virtually all these (80 percent) represent homes in which the paper is actually purchased by the copy (far more often) through a continuing home delivery. On the average weekday, one or more newspapers are read by 81 percent of the adult men, 79 percent of the adult women, and by 72 percent of the teen-age population between the ages of 15 and 20. There is a negligible variation in readership according to the day of the week. In nine cases out of ten the paper is read at home, being predominantly home-delivered on a regular daily basis. This makes the newspaper a habitual feature of everyday life, most noticed perhaps when for some reason it fails to appear.

Different segments of the population show a remarkable uniformity in the extent to which papers are read each day. Since daily newspapers are published in centers of population, household readership is universally high in metropolitan areas (91 percent) and in villages and towns of from 2,500 to 50,000 (86 percent). It is lower (72 percent) in rural areas. This is reflected geographically in the higher rate of daily readership in the most urban regions and the lower rate in the most rural regions.

While there are only minor differences in newspaper reading at different ages, household readership jumps from 70 percent among families of less than a \$3,000 income to 86 percent among families with incomes of \$3,000 to \$5,000, and continues upward to a saturation level among families with higher incomes. Similarly, the readership rises along with the occupational status of the family head, with education, and with activity in voluntary associations (at every income level). As the amount of reading goes up, so does the number of individual papers read by each reader.

People who do not read a newspaper tend to be on the margins of society. They are most likely to be found among rural folk, among those with family incomes at the lower level (under \$3,000), among families headed by farmers or unskilled laborers or the unemployed. Many of these marginal people, it should be noted, are those who do not own a television set.

There is a complex relationship between an individual's educational level and the regularity of his newspaper reading, as well as the number of papers he reads, the thoroughness with which he reads them, and the amount of time he spends reading each paper. As education goes up, so does the proportion of readers who read more than one paper, the regularity of reading (expressed in terms of the number of days of the week on which a paper is read), and the thoroughness of reading (as reported by the respondent). But the person with a college education spends less time with the average paper he reads than does the person who has never gone beyond grade school. Since the college man reads more papers each day, he spends more time with newspapers altogether, even though his reading speed takes him more quickly through each one.

A long series of studies, academic and commercial, has demonstrated the tendency of better educated persons to be oriented more strongly to print than to the broadcast media, and for the reverse to be true at lower levels of education and social status. The recent survey already cited shows similar results. Among the college educated, 45 percent report that they "would feel quite lost" if they had to get along "for quite some time" without newspapers, but at the same time they say that they could get used to the absence of TV; only 7 percent gave the reverse answer. However, that proportion who would "feel lost" without TV and could get along without newspapers rises to 12 percent among those with no more than a grade school education, while the proportion who would "feel lost" without newspapers and could get along without television goes down to 28 percent. Apparently, although less educated people rely less on newspapers, they do not rely correspondingly more on television. They just feel less strongly about the mass media as such.

Although newspaper readership increases with education, there are only small absolute differences in daily reading between the well-educated and the poorly educated, because exposure to the medium is so nearly universal. There are also only minor differences in the way people use the newspaper as a communication device—from the standpoint of what they particularly like to read. Social differences are much more dramatic when we consider the reader's more active behavior in relation to the newspaper as an institution. The more unusual or selective the activity, the greater the contrast between persons at different educational levels. Thus, 8 percent of the public reports having written a letter to the editor at some time or another, but the proportion ranges from 2 percent (among



those with a grade school education) to 17 percent (among those with some college education).

All these things together, however, suggest that as one ascends the social scale there is a greater sense of ease, intimacy, and personal relationship between the reader and his paper. It seems as though the better-educated reader is more likely to view his hometown paper as an institution made up of people doing a job, subject to personal influences, and capable of rendering a service. For those lower on the educational scale, the newspaper as a major institution of power appears more remote and impersonal.

In our increasingly complex and interdependent world, the fate of every individual is shaped by circumstances remote from his personal experience, and we learn through impersonal sources about events which deeply affect our lives. When newspapers replaced the rumors of the populace and the couriers of the king, reports of important happenings took on a standardized form. The specialists of the press developed a conventionalized procedure for reporting, interpreting, and evaluating news events. The public came to accept tacitly the assumption that events occur in a particular form, the form in which the reporter observes them and describes them in print.

Folk judgment ascribes an aura of finality to the printed word, and perhaps this is partly based on the awareness of every reader that the account he reads is also the one to which "everyone else" will similarly refer. He assumes that the press has a broader perspective than any single lay observer. Even the experience of a firsthand exposure to an important event takes on a different quality in retrospect when the newspaper account of it is read on the following day. There is a common-sense distinction between the media which depend on schedules and whose function is primarily to pass the time or to entertain, and the more cerebral publishing media which convey ideas and images at the reader's own pace. This distinction is in no way contradicted by the obvious fact that the timebound media also inform and that publishing media also entertain.

In this instance, the evidence from our survey bears out common sense. About seven people out of ten say that news is more important to them than newspaper features or entertainment.<sup>6</sup> This proportion is roughly the same for men and for women, and it holds true at every age, at every income level, and in cities of different sizes. The proportions

also remain very much the same among people who read the paper every day and people who read it less often. The percentages stay the same regardless of how much time the reader spends with each paper. Some types of readers might describe as entertainment what others consider information, and vice versa. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that newspapers are read with different motives as one descends the social scale, even though TV assumes a more important recreational role. Each medium, in fact, appears to have its own autonomous place in the lives of the common audience.

A person who is absorbed in the political and civic affairs of his own community might be thought to show a more realistic involvement with life's problems than one who seeks out accounts of earthquakes on distant continents or the love life of European royalty. Yet normally we assume the reverse: parochial concerns seem far less appropriate to the realistic demands of our complex society than does an interest in the broader affairs of the nation and the world. It seems reasonable to assume, moreover, that an interest in the wider world hinges on a capacity for abstraction and on the imagination necessary to empathize with remote figures in an unfamiliar environment. Accounts of local news events, even in the impersonal metropolis, have points of reference to the reader's own experience. The reader who seeks out the news of his own immediate world must be thought of as more literal-minded and as taking comfort in the security of familiar scenes and protagonists. Correspondingly, as he reads he resists any involvement with the threatening forces that impinge on his little world from the great and troublesome world outside.

Forced to choose between local and world news, the American public divides rather evenly: 45 percent report a greater interest in the national or international scene, 52 percent in what is happening in their own city or town. However, there is a sharp difference between men and women. Men show a greater preference for national and international news, women for news of local events. Interest in local news is greatest among older people, whose roots in the community go deep, and it is least among young people in their twenties who have perhaps the greatest feelings of personal mobility.

Common sense tells us that the cosmopolitan outlook is a peculiarly urban one, and the evidence bears this out. Interest in local news is greatest in rural areas under 2,500 in population, and it is higher in non-metropolitan cities and towns of 2,500 to 50,000 than within the metro-

politan areas. Among both men and women, interest in national and international events increases with education and income. The better-educated person, more cosmopolitan in his outlook and least attached to television entertainment, continues to rely on newspapers for his daily orientation to the changing world around him. The less educated, who spend more time on television, fail to get from this standardized national medium the kind of local gossip and news that is obtainable from the newspaper.

Critics of the press are fond of suggesting that advice to the lovelorn and Hollywood gossip be replaced by more book reviews and art columns. This type of criticism and the rebuttal to it are not unique to the press at all, but have their counterparts in the criticism of all mass media. Take an editor who cuts out a background story on the political line-up in Ecuador and substitutes a feature article about a cat caught in a drain-pipe. His problem is no different from that of the TV executive who must choose between a western and a program on the modern dance for a prime spot in the evening. In either case, the personal taste of the decision-maker is set aside in favor of his professional judgment. The quarrel of the critics is really with the criterion that the public must be pleased. And since the editor or producer shapes or confirms popular tastes at the same time as he follows it, he is always uncomfortably uncertain as to whether he is hatching a chicken or laying an egg.

There is no question but that newspapers have held their readers and maintained their traditional functions during the youth of television. Their capacity to withstand its attractions for the advertiser may well be strengthened as TV itself becomes, like radio, an individual rather than a family medium, and as the viewer's choice is spread among more stations. Technological changes will transform the newspaper of tomorrow, as well as TV, for the revolution in the media of our time has by no means run its course.

#### REFERENCES

1. This jibes with the fact that television viewing remains at about the same level, regardless of the number of channels the viewer can choose from. Both findings suggest a variation of Parkinson's Law that work expands to fit the time available for its completion: so, it would seem, does leisure activity.

2. This item, like most of the other information on readership referred to in this article, is from a survey made in the spring of 1961, among a national probability sample of 2,449 households. A total of 4,826 individual interviews with persons fifteen and over were made by the research firm of Audits & Surveys Incorporated, in technical consultation with the Advertising Research Foundation. The study was made under the supervision of the Bureau of Advertising of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, and under the sponsorship of the Newsprint Information Committee. In order to measure accurately the reach of the 1,760 daily newspapers and 563 Sunday newspapers that together make up the national medium, the sampling was spread over 622 different interviewing points in 100 sampling areas.
3. The new West Coast edition of the *New York Times* and the various regional editions of the *Wall Street Journal* have been made possible by recent technical innovations which any paper could readily adopt—if it had a potential national audience and a potential advertising base. But the *if* is a big one.
4. The same set of conditions makes for a difference in the typical range of circulation for morning and afternoon papers. The morning paper, printed during the night, can be carried farther afield before the day breaks. The delivery trucks for the afternoon paper must contend with clogged roads. The production of the afternoon paper, repeatedly interrupted for new editions with changed content and make-up, is harder to fit into the kind of schedule that goes with a geographically spread broad circulation.
5. The Columbia University School of Journalism has done a study of the younger alumni of that school (*Journalism Review*, Summer 1962). It reports that two-thirds go to newspapers and wire services, but that six years after graduation only half have remained with these jobs. The others, who had gone primarily into broadcasting and secondarily into public relations or magazine publishing, expressed a greater satisfaction with their present jobs than did those who had remained on newspaper staffs. Unfortunately there is no evidence on this subject from a broader national sampling.
6. In this study the respondents rated themselves as “much more” or “somewhat more interested” in either the news or features. A similar self-rating was used to report whether their interest was greater in news of national and international events or in the local news of the community.

# 6

## Literary Criticism, the Publisher and the Reader

LITERARY CRITICISM and book reviewing (the two are not necessarily the same thing) are the favorite whipping-boys in book publishing. Nobody, it seems, is particularly content with the state of the art of evaluating new books—not authors (well, hardly ever), not publishers (except when their own books are well received), not reviewers (whose essays are altered by editors), not editors (who have all those essays to edit). Nevertheless, the reviews are, in their own milieu, indispensable; they are publicity, good or bad, and publicity is essential to book publishing.

In this section, two professors from Yale, Henri Peyre and John Hollander, offer thoughtful critiques of American book reviewing.

At the end of the issue of *Daedalus* on which this book is based, there was a section headed by this statement: "Given what has been said about American book reviewing both in this issue and elsewhere, the Editors concluded that there might be some use in publishing a collection of reviews which would not be subject to the conventional criticisms." The first of these was a review of "Catch-22" by Joseph Heller, and it raised a storm of protest. At the time, "Catch-22" was enjoying (and it still enjoys) a great vogue. Yossarian Fan Clubs (so named for the hero of the book) had sprung up

around the country. When the *Daedalus* review was reprinted in the *National Observer*, these fans fired back with vitriolic letters-to-the-editor. They demanded to know the identity of the reviewer and implied that once they knew who he was, they would seek his scalp. We reprint here, still anonymously, the celebrated “Catch-22” review.

# *What Is Wrong with American Book-Reviewing?*

"BEFORE we have an American literature, we must have an American criticism," James Russell Lowell once pronounced. A rich and original American renaissance in literature, however, was taking place even as Lowell, Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Melville, and others were writing. A hundred years later, American literature, of the two great literatures in English, had become the more rigorous and influential abroad. At the same time, foreign observers of America, and not a few Americans themselves, watched with wonder or dismay the stupendous growth of criticism in the United States. France alone among the European lands presented a similar sight: and contemporary American criticism ignored the recent French critical thinking about as complacently as the French remained unimpressed by our "new criticism," practical or theoretical. It was a miracle that in neither country did the plethora of disquisitions on the goal and meaning of literature, on a reborn and proud rhetoric, on how to dissect a novel or how to read a page of verse, succeed in drying up the energy of creators or in dampening their uncritical audacity. Since 1945 the British, always prone to some patronizing condescension when judging the labor of American professors and quick to deplore the inelegant jargon of the specialists in literary dissection, have often deplored the fact that their former colony has become a beehive of ponderous critics, addicted to the un-English but earnest sport of juggling general ideas.

In the United States today we do indeed live in an age of criticism, at least in academic circles. The number of articles, pamphlets, and books published on Hemingway, Faulkner, Joyce, Yeats, Eliot, even on Proust, Rilke, Mann and Beckett, is truly staggering. They are read mostly by other professors and by awe-struck students. Attempts have been made,

often with dubious results, to attach poets in residence and superannuated novelists to some colleges so as to foster "creative writing." Their Socratic function is to answer the questions aimed at them by young Platos titillated by the sacrosanct word "creativity." In truth, however, ninety-five percent of our courses in American, English, or foreign literatures and in composition teach solely criticism. The mountain of so-called critical essays perpetrated within a decade by the four million students in American colleges, not to mention the high school teenagers, would rise higher, if less majestically, than the Grand Tetons. Curiously enough, the authors of these essays turn after graduation to the pursuit of happiness on Wall Street, Madison Avenue, or Sunset Boulevard; they manufacture gadgets, bring forth a progeny, husband their funds in order to send their sons and daughters to colleges, where they will in turn write critical essays every two weeks: very few ever practice the art of evaluating the literature or the art of their times. Not many can be said to retain a critical attitude toward the books which they will occasionally open, toward the plays they will watch, or toward the half-veiled persuaders in their midst. If prosperous and encumbered with a wealth which they would rather not sacrifice to a rapacious income tax office, they occasionally assist universities in founding a review devoted to more criticism. The number of such scholarly journals has easily doubled in the last ten years with the founding of periodicals issuing from such universities as Texas, Wisconsin, Louisiana, Wayne, Minnesota, Boston, Chicago, etc. The quality of the essays thus published, while very unequal, is sometimes high. The difficulty lies in the dearth of readers. Since doctors and analysts have not yet taken to prescribing the reading of scholarly criticism to restore sleep to insomnia-ridden patients or to untie oedipal knots, most serious magazines in America vie with one another for the shrinking time of normal readers. Our reading public has not grown in proportion to the increasing literate population of this country. We may legitimately take pride in our paperback era which has placed all the classics (and more and more of the books published up to five years ago) within the reach of millions. Not only reprints of "safe" volumes but also originals have been enterprisingly published in this form and have attracted or created their audience.

Nevertheless, it is true that many new works of genuine significance remain unnoticed or hardly read. This country has a population approximately three times greater than any of the four most advanced



countries in Western Europe, and a much larger proportion of that population is "exposed" to a college education. Yet important new books, even those of political or sociological import, certainly many volumes of fiction, drama, poetry and speculative or critical thought, seldom find more than four or five thousand purchasers; the corresponding figure would be higher in Britain, France or West Germany, each with less than a third of our population. It is too easy to brand the cinema or television as the culprits—they are to be found elsewhere. It is even more fallacious to imagine the average Englishman or Frenchman as innately more endowed with fastidious taste than is the American. The novels encountered in many middle-class homes or in lending libraries in Britain seem far from edifying to the literary critic; and the success of Françoise Sagan and of similar "prodigies" in France testifies to the gregariousness of the French or to their uncritical response to publicity, rather than to their taste. Something is deeply wrong, not so much with the American reading public itself as with its guides and mentors.

"The critic" (in the singular) is but an abstract entity, and the multifarious functions of criticism can only be fulfilled by several divergent minds. Unanimity in any acclaim for a book (whether or not by a Nobel Prize winner), a play, a concert performer, or an artist, even if he has become as venerable as Picasso or Chagall, should arouse suspicion. It can only be a sign of conventionality, of intellectual laziness, or timidity. The worst that can happen to any department of literature is to have achieved such a unity of methods and views among its members that dissent no longer stimulates the students, and their critical sense becomes dulled by dogma.

Some critics are at their best when evolving a theory of literature in general, debating standards or a system of aesthetics, attempting to link specific works with a broad genre, or a national tradition, or a philosophical approach. They seldom review books other than those also offering a theory of criticism. The novels that appear (perhaps of an ephemeral interest) do not seem worth their while; in any case, general theories seldom provide criteria with which to evaluate new works. One hardly expects a profound philosophical mind like that of Heidegger, Blanchot, or Poulet, Kenneth Burke, or Northrop Frye, or William Wimsatt to condescend to reviewing new novels or to entice uninitiated readers into the deceptive arcana of current production. All except the unhappy few who do not pursue pleasure in literature stand in awe of them. Their in-

fluence, which will be lasting and deep, acts chiefly through the universities.

Other critics set themselves the task of reappraising the works of the past, which yield a new meaning every twelve or fifteen years to each new generation. They are unusually perspicacious readers; they bring to their reading the enrichment afforded by their knowledge of the historical background, of minor writers, of sources and influences. They project into the past, in order to arouse it to life, the concerns of their own age, their romantic anguish, their Freudian or Jungian psychology, their obsessions with symbols, their Marxist or existentialist doctrines. The very trend of their loaded questions brings forth answers with which their predecessors, probably less complex, had not been rewarded. Many of these critics are college professors who, when lecturing on Sophocles or Racine or Wordsworth to demanding audiences of young students, have to discover new layers of meaning in these classics. They are so accustomed to dealing with the three or four score of great authors who have survived the shipwreck of time that they cannot be expected to evince much patience with the untried works of their own age. A forgivable professional idiosyncrasy often leads those critics to use the remarks of other critics as a springboard so as to convince those peers or rivals of their mistakes or limitations, and to utilize that springboard to plunge into the mysteries of the work under discussion, or to soar more boldly. They revel in judging anew what has already been judged many times. Thus, "Oedipus Rex," a few lines of Virgil or of Dante, the same scene in "Hamlet" or "Phèdre," the same "anniversary" by Donne or the same "ode" by Wordsworth or poem by Yeats or quartet by Eliot are endlessly tortured by those critics. They resemble actors and singers who must be tested by their interpretations of the celebrated monologues or arias which brought fame to their predecessors. Book-reviewing for these eternal reappraisers of the past or those sedulous high priests of the classics can but be a secondary and perfunctory occupation.

Unlike these two groups of writers on literature, the theoreticians and the reappraisers of the classics, who have world enough and time, and who publish their leisurely essays when and as they wish (their main source of income is usually derived from some other profession), book reviewers are pursued by deadlines. They are not free to expand their judgments or to expound theories apropos of the new book, treated as a text or as a pretext. Space is limited to so many words; quotations are

frowned on; obscure or overly literary language is taken to be a pedantic effort to puzzle the average reader, who in this country is not credited with much epicurean delight in words. The number of new books accumulating on the desk of the reviewer, sometimes sent to him directly by the author himself with a hyperbolic dedication, is staggering. Even if he is conscientious enough to read them through and not just to skip, he seldom enjoys the chance to reread and either confirm or contradict his first impression. One of the crucial questions which conscientious critics must keep asking themselves is thus forbidden the reviewer: "Does the charm of this new book, its power over me, wear out? Or do I perceive new complexities, a hidden depth, which had first passed unnoticed? Was its interest due to timeliness or to circumstances which will fail to touch my successors or my children? Has the virtue I discerned in this volume been felt equally by other readers, and is it likely to fire still others in diverse lands, or is it devoid of any widespread or universal appeal?"

Criticism, and the criticism of contemporary literature in particular, can hardly ever hope to scale impressive heights. "No statue was ever raised to a critic," Sibelius is reported to have muttered. Music critics are the most maligned (by composers), and perhaps they deserve it. Art critics are hardly more assured of survival, at least if they have devoted themselves solely to apportioning praise and blame to their contemporaries. Joshua Reynolds, Roger Fry, Lionello Venturi, André Malraux, Henri Focillon, or Erwin Panofsky survive by the vast portion of their work that is devoted to the past or to theoretical writing. Sainte-Beuve's "Port-Royal" is a lasting and admirably scholarly monument of erudition and psychological insight, but it looks back two hundred years. The truly great critics are the creators: Goethe at times, Balzac on "La Chartreuse de Parme," Hugo on Balzac, Baudelaire on Wagner and on "Madame Bovary," Mallarmé, and Thomas Mann. But we admire them for portraying themselves, even if involuntarily, rather than their models. Moreover, these novelists and poets were never subjected to the drudgery of having to assess the current production and of commenting on writers for whom they entertained scant esteem.

In America imaginative writers have seldom been inclined to state their views on literary technique (Henry James excepted) or to judge the work of their contemporaries. John Dos Passos or Thornton Wilder could have done it superbly, but have chosen otherwise. T. S. Eliot reno-

vated our stock of critical ideas in the 'twenties and occasionally proved acutely perceptive on books of that decade; he erred signally at other times and prudently withdrew some prefaces or articles from his reprinted works.

It is a great misfortune that there are all too few nonacademic critics of the first order in the United States. Our important monthlies, for all their excellence in commenting on politics at home and abroad, fail or do not care to succeed in giving their readers an adequate view of what happens in the world of books, even less so in the world of art and music. (Records alone, tersely described, detain their attention.) Their comments on current books amount to little more than enumerations and shallow opinions which cannot tempt many readers. Equally regrettable is the small space granted to the criticism of books in the *New Yorker*, which could have wielded an incalculable influence as the guide of sophisticated taste in America: space for such criticism is niggardly allowed at the very end of each number, while it is allotted over-generously to long profiles squeezed between two columns of advertising. The *New Republic* and the *Nation* have had their vicissitudes in the last three or four decades. At different phases, however, they have provided the very best, the most discriminating and the most prophetic view of literature in America. *Commentary* and the *Partisan Review* (although it has not fulfilled its promises of becoming the broad, lively and well-written review of America) have grouped outstanding critical talent; still, their influence on literary opinion at large is limited, and at present probably shrinking. The United States is perhaps too vast a country for any one critic to become an oracle or a trusted counselor. If any two men in our mid-century were qualified to play that role, they would be Edmund Wilson and Alfred Kazin. The collections of reviews by the former, even more perhaps than his books on "Axel's Castle," on the historians who preceded and prepared Lenin's arrival at "the Finland Station," and on Turgenev, have stood the test of time. Alfred Kazin's "Contemporaries" (1962) contains in our opinion the fairest, shrewdest, and wisest criticism of a decade. A note of plaintive severity creeps into some of the articles, many of which appeared in the *Reporter*; the remonstrating tone may irk those readers who would prefer to be amused. But the critic has read widely and not in English alone, has felt intensely, has reflected, and he has had the courage to choose between the good and the bad, between the good and the less good, and to state his

reasons for his opinions. The last essays in that volume, "The Critic's Task," are in every way worthy of the straightforward pronouncement of the liveliest of English critics of the romantic age, William Hazlitt: "I have endeavored to feel what was good and to give a reason for the faith that was in me, when necessary and when in my power."

It is unfortunate that criticism of such high quality, well-written, urbane and thoughtful at the same time, should reach relatively few readers and wield small influence on the general public. Few of our weeklies (*Time* magazine or *Newsweek*, for all their merits, do not attempt much literary criticism) reach more than a few thousand persons. Our monthlies are lucky when, by dint of active publicity, they print a few tens of thousands. Yet nearly a million young people every year enter our colleges and universities. They take courses in English, often in a foreign language, and presumably are instilled with a little zest for reading and some desire to understand the world around them: and literature is probably the best means at our disposal to understand other people and ourselves. We would even contend that many a divorce and many an estrangement in young married couples caused by naïveté, clumsiness, and lack of imagination and thoughtfulness in the American male might be avoided if young people had gained a little more vicarious experience of life, a little more appreciation of sentiment, a better preparation to face the discords of wedlock, through the reading of novels and plays. The yearly crop of almost a million college graduates should provide a sizable public for the reading of books; once these students learned to want to read books of some merit. A statistical inquiry (if a truthful one could be made) would show, we fear, that the graduates who read one book a month are a sad minority. Someone is at fault if our leisure, which is increasing for all but the managerial groups in our society, is not utilized more profitably.

Mass media have been blamed; but these are not the contrivances of diabolical obscurantists, intent on obliterating all power of attention in us so as to convert us into ready purchasers of a soap, a brush, a watch or a cosmetic. The guilty ones are those who form the passive elements in the audience. In other countries the radio has become a vehicle of book-reviewing as effective as the press and at just as high a level. The typically American habit, now adopted by the British, of having all the reviews of a new book appear the same week in all the weeklies, and on the same day in the dailies, probably constitutes a handicap to the

diffusion of that book. Massive publicity that quotes excerpts from the reviewers sells a novel by Steinbeck or by Ellison or Irvin Shaw; but it quickly passes on to another new book, and the previous one sinks into semi-oblivion. The readers who buy a novel as soon as it appears are not many. Staggered reviews, followed by more elaborate ones in the monthlies and the quarterlies, would probably serve the authors better. Among the purchasers of books, even more than among purchasers of automobiles or of shelters, there is a resistance to the pressure of publicity which our persuaders would do well to take into account. The present writer has heard far more buyers of "For Whom the Bell Tolls," "East of Eden," and lately, "A Ship of Fools," protest angrily against the claims put forward by publicity and by reviewers, claims which these readers failed to find worth their money and their time: they swore they would not be taken in a second time.

The lament most often heard in university circles in America is that we do not have in this country a *Times Literary Supplement* and that the New York *Times* weekly book section fails to come up to the famed British weekly. In truth, the comparison is not a fair one. The *T. L. S.* reaches some fifty thousand readers, a sizable fraction of them outside Britain, in particular among American college professors. The New York *Times* addresses itself to twenty-five times that number of purchasers. The *T. L. S.*, like *Le Monde* in France and corresponding highbrow papers in Zurich or Milan, is published in a country where the interest in literature is lively and widespread. Readers of such newspapers are on the whole informed and curious about the new books and plays discussed at dinner parties or in cafés. They have received substantially the same kind of education, done the same required reading in philosophy, history, and literature for the matriculation, the French baccalaureate, or the corresponding and equally standardized examinations in Germany or Italy.

For varied reasons, things are managed otherwise in this country, much vaster and more diverse geographically, less standardized and far more anarchistic, or stubbornly individualistic, in its education. Criticism of literature or art, reviews of books on music or the philosophy of history, appeal less to the American than to the European. The average American is convinced that his ilk is not interested in books published in a foreign tongue; the French press shares that conviction. But British weeklies readily review volumes in French, German, or even Russian, and are not afraid of quoting French in the text. American periodicals,

except for scholarly journals, review foreign books only when they are published here in translation.

Even so, the record of book-reviewing in *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* or *L'Express* is not exemplary. A great many errors of judgment have been committed by the critics of *Le Monde* when it was called *Le Temps* (by Paul Souday, André Thérive, and much earlier by Anatole France) and by its recent reviewers. The tone of the criticism is academic, often sanctimonious. New novels are relatively neglected (new poetry even more so) under the pretext that they accumulate too fast. Preference goes to works dealing with ideas or with past literature reexamined. In most French periodicals, the reviewer is regularly the same man, entrusted with the weekly article on books, and thus well established in his fortress, but also able to compare one work to another and to propose ranks or to discriminate.

Finally, the *mores* of literary life differ. For better or worse, continental critics, and some British in the livelier periodicals like the *New Statesman* or *Encounter* often enjoy being sarcastic, ferocious, sometimes vicious and patently unfair. The *homo americanus* is probably the most good-natured, the least cantankerous, of the human race. If a critic of contemporary books, he is wary of hurting authors, or perhaps he is not sure enough of himself to heap derisive obloquy on a new work. After all, many critics in the past who dealt thus with art and literature have since been proved ludicrously wrong.

The *Times Literary Supplement* is in many ways an admirable weekly of literary information and thoughtful criticism. It is pleasantly written, varied, lively; it covers books appearing in several languages and in several countries; it touches on art, the history of music, biography, philosophy, religion, travel, sports, etc. Still, it is not above reproach. The scattering of interests is often excessive, the titles of many articles are not only too farfetched and smart but also deceptive. Many of the editorial comments on the middle page are platitudinous and inconsequential. A note of complacency or superciliousness has often marred articles dealing with American scholarly works (literary, sociological, historical). Its reviews of new novels, often grouped at random under one heading, are frequently hasty and amateurish. It has committed serious errors in failing to hail as significant many of the books published in the 'twenties or 'thirties (by Joyce, Lawrence, Pound, Eliot) which are now esteemed as classics. A picture of British fiction or drama drawn since 1920 from

the articles in *T. L. S.* with a thirty-year retrospect would make us laugh today, as would a similar picture of American literature from the *New York Times* or of French literature from *Le Temps* or *La Revue de Paris*. In any case, it is unlikely that we could have a *T. L. S.* in America, even if some foundation financed the undertaking, without its falling into the hands of academic critics.

The regret most often voiced by observers of literary life in America is that the weeklies supposedly devoted to literature have progressively moved away from the promises of their titles and have granted more and more space to advertising, to brief articles on phonograph records, schools, politics, and other sundry topics. This is notoriously the case with the *Saturday Review*. Many American intellectuals frown on it as a magazine of popularization for the culture vultures of the female sex, to be placed conspicuously in the sitting room next to TV magazines and the latest from the Book-of-the-Month Club. It is far from perfect, to be sure, but many of its reviews are discriminating and inform readers honestly and wisely on the content of a book. That is more than one can say for a number of reviews in certain European periodicals for the literary elite, in which the critic hardly pays any attention to the new volume under review, which he considers a mere springboard for expressing his own ideas. He is fond of admonishing the unfortunate author on how he should have written his book to please the reviewer. "Do not speak while I interrupt you" is not too unfair a caricature of the conversation of an average Latin when he wields a critic's pen. The most serious flaw in the *Saturday Review* is the lack of a clear editorial policy, the dearth of substantial articles by the editorial board that evaluate books according to firm critical standards. The American editor is wary of playing the role which many Europeans expect so-called intellectuals to fulfill—that of doing the thinking of the lay reader for him.

The flaws of the *New York Times* are just as glaring. While it too is heterogeneous, concentrating daily on one book and therefore excluding comparative evaluations of other novels or biographies of the same category, the articles by Orville Prescott, Charles Poore, and others are often (in this reader's opinion) comparable to the most trenchant reviews of current productions in European periodicals of wide circulation in London, Manchester, or Paris. But those reviews are tucked away on a page which only the determined reader eventually reaches, after leafing through plentiful news on local and foreign politics, sport contests, tran-



scripts of statemen's speeches, and much else. "All the news that's fit to print" also means a surfeit of news, which passes on to the reader the burden of discriminating, selecting, assimilating. Courses on how to read a newspaper should be offered in every American school.

The Sunday book section has rich possibilities; it does not often fulfill them, in the opinion of the literary reader or of many authors who are irked that their books are not noticed, while others which they deem inferior (and which perhaps are) receive attention. One should bear in mind that such a Sunday supplement is not destined primarily for the highbrow; it seldom pioneers into avant-garde territory, which will perhaps be the regular fare of readers twenty years from now. It aims at informing the general reader who comes to that section after having sated his appetite for news with some two hundred pages of diverse reading matter, or having pondered over the stock market or the descriptions of the previous Saturday weddings. It is to be lamented (perhaps some day that plague of the none-too-well-hidden persuaders may be averted from us) that the advertising of books which hardly belong to literature and which promise a well-adjusted sex life or peace of mind through subscription to a book club or the contemplation of Goya, Van Gogh, or Picasso should be granted so much space, while book reviews often have to be emasculated to retain their cramped box. It is equally deplorable that the reviews are short, lacking in continuity and unity of point of view, and that there are far too few articles of general interest (like the excellent long articles in the Sunday magazine section on a political, economic, or demographic subject), and that few discussions of the biographies, the essays or poems of a whole season ever appear.

The general editor's proverbial iron hand in a velvet glove is probably deficient in iron. The choice of books to be reviewed impresses one as arbitrary; shorter notices, which might fill the gap when certain books of value cannot receive a full review, would be a felicitous alternative. The style of a motley company of reviewers (many not native Americans) is edited so as to become drearily uniform; rare words, which might humiliate the casual reader who has no Latin and whose vocabulary has shrunk since college are driven out; flamboyance in style seems to be dreaded by those who reign in editorial offices. Finally, many of the reviews are too lenient or else noncommittal. The reviewer is reluctant to say outright that a book is bad or mediocre, either from fear of a publisher who is also an advertiser or from excessive kindness.

"A book's a book, although there's nothing in it," Byron once mocked. Some American reviewers seem to have adopted that motto.

It may be that in time the pressure of readers and the constructive criticism of professors or recent graduates who earnestly wish advice on what to read and on who are the worthwhile writers of their time, will remedy some of the deficiencies of the *New York Times* or *Herald Tribune* Sunday book reviews. Meanwhile, it would be unfair to forget that many excellent ones have appeared in those columns, reviews that are easily comparable to those in the best foreign periodicals; and that not a few readers have been drawn to difficult recent works by those weekly sheets, far more so relatively than by the reviews in *Harper's* or the *Atlantic* or *Time* magazine. In this writer's opinion, the only constructive solution does not lie in launching a new weekly made up only of reviews of volumes of a literary, historical, philosophical, or artistic character. Such a publication simply would not attract enough subscribers to be effective. Too few people today, even in Europe, are interested in literature as such, excluding political, social, even scientific topics and excluding current events. America is too vast, the readers' interests are too conflicting, the reluctance to sever literature from life, even from politics and sociology, is too ingrained for any such weekly journal of pure criticism to succeed.

Diversity should remain an essential feature of current criticism in America. No academy will ever claim to dictate to public taste, as has been attempted with indifferent success in Paris or Leningrad. New magazines must continue to crop up and to vituperate against the more staid and venerable ones. Their reviewers may be university dons, but they may also be men and women who care deeply for literature, who write with vigor and warmth; they need not have learned their trade in college courses in criticism or have been impregnated by the *Criterion* or the *Kenyon Review*. The less academic they are, the better. Only by improving the book-reviewing in the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, the *Commonweal*, the *Reporter*, and other weeklies where criticism is already quite good, and by persuading the monthlies that their own criticism should and could be better, and by inciting the public, hence the editors, to ask for better literary, art, and music criticism can it be hoped that American discrimination in those matters will greatly improve. A good beginning might be a gathering, under the sponsorship of some foundation, of some eighty publishers, editors, and literary critics of

America, comparable to a similar international gathering in Europe in 1962 that proved a source of fruitful reflection to many. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences would serve the cause of American culture if it could procure the funds and the leadership for a three-day convention, from which a clearer awareness of what is right and wrong with our book-reviewing might emerge.

The eventual gains would accrue to the public, which desperately wants to be guided through the labyrinth of publications, for it has been led to eye with suspicion both advertisements and the banal uncommitted reviews. The gains would also benefit the authors themselves. In no other great country today do the makers of literature work in such isolation; in no country are they so averse to the affluent society which surrounds and supports them. Even the vituperations of Flaubert, the Goncourts, or Zola against the bourgeoisie and the philistines fail to equal the wrath against business pursuits, big money, movie magnates, "decent" family life, or well-meaning average women which has envenomed almost all American novels and plays from Dreiser, Lewis, and O'Neill down to Mailer, Styron, Updike, and our young authors, who are less angry than suffering. This almost unanimous hostility on the part of imaginative writers—and lately of the social critics of our organization men, our suburbanites, and the new villains of our age, the Madison Avenue "brainwashers"—is a grave flaw in our culture. Through college courses and paperbacks, it is permeating the young with pessimism or with cynicism. It would take no more than a serious recession to turn their disaffection into a mire like that into which some of their predecessors sank during the 'thirties. Yet American writers are better rewarded in terms of royalties, lecturing opportunities, or movie rights than any others in the world. Money has never been enough or even primarily what they wanted. They lack circles of critics and fervent devotees of literature who would criticize them intelligently, help them see their creations with some detachment, discriminate between their good work and their failures, interpret them to themselves and to the audience of the young for which all artists yearn.

Do these potential intermediaries between the writers and their work, between the writers and their natural allies who could break the isolation to which they feel doomed, exist anywhere in the United States? The answer is emphatically a positive one. They exist in the colleges and universities, which wield today as much if not more power in this country

than the academies and *cénacles* did once in older lands, or than the Catholic Church enjoyed in medieval times in its tax-exempt domains and its monasteries with their enormous spiritual influence. Professors of literature and "American studies" have some leisure; they are decently rewarded, and as humanists, they are fortunate in that they want chiefly to be left alone; hence they need fewer funds than do their colleagues in the sciences or the social sciences, whose research now tends to be oriented by their sources of support. They are asked to lecture to culture vultures of all ages and of either sex. They have in the classroom a captive audience whom they can attempt to indoctrinate, and into whom they should instill an eagerness to read and to think long after twenty-one or twenty-five.

Academic critics, however, appear to shy away from any book-reviewing which is not destined for their scholarly journals and which therefore does not deal with other works of scholarship. Occasionally some of them will venture to appraise recent poetry, even more seldom recent fiction, in the *Sewanee Review*, the *Kenyon Review*, the *Virginia Quarterly*, or the *Yale Review*. But these review articles on current imaginative literature are tucked away in some obscure columns so as not to obtrude into the really substantial part of the periodical devoted to more serious pursuits. Future authors of dissertations will one day stand aghast at the distorted view of American literature at its liveliest (1919-1939) which will emerge from the criticism in our quarterlies during those two decades.

Most professors of literature—at the very time when they are multiplying articles to show condescendingly how Milton, Keats, Browning, Hardy, Melville, or Hawthorne were unacknowledged or misunderstood by their contemporaries—refuse to discriminate from among the productions of today and to mold the public taste.<sup>1</sup> Their timidity stems from their clinging to the literary standards evolved from their studies of the past. Even more than lawyers, they cherish precedents. Their notions of beauty, greatness, profundity, structure (none of which is susceptible of an easy definition) were attained by the dissection of the few novels, plays, and poems of earlier ages which have been decreed as classics. Yet if new works also are some day to rank among the classics—that is, volumes studied in the classroom (as those of e. e. cummings, Wallace Stevens, Tennessee Williams, Nathanael West, Saul Bellows, even perhaps Jack Kerouac and J. D. Salinger are studied today) are original only if they

differ from the works bequeathed by the past. Their authors translate their own vision of life in a language that is fresh; and they should be appraised, not in terms of their conformity with antecedent masterpieces, but on their own terms.

It is up to the reviewer to enter into their universe and to judge the revolutionary author according to his own laws. It is no paradox to submit that the academic reviewer should forget his familiarity with the past when confronted by new works; in all fairness he should never crush the new novel, the new painting, the new music, by comparison with three or more centuries of fiction, art, and music in several lands. His task is that of a discoverer. His attitude should be one of open-mindedness and freshness. Naturally, nine-tenths or more of what is modern today is doomed to oblivion, as has always been the case; but which nine-tenths? The reviewer may be emboldened to say, even if he is later proved wrong. Audacity is part of a critic's armory.

Recently the most eager among the young critics of America evolved a set of concepts and criteria which they imparted to their students, only to find the latter applying them dogmatically and mechanically. These bellicose "new" critics easily cowed into acquiescence many of their overawed enemies among the old fogies on the faculty, but they did not preserve themselves from their well-meaning friends and students. Unwittingly, the latter have caricatured them. They learn in college what the criteria of tragedy are according to Aristotle—which is about as reasonable as appealing to Euclid or to Hippocrates in judging the geometry or the medicine of today. They then decide who among the moderns is tragic (no term of praise has become more prestigious in our age of anxiety) and who is not. They pull out of their schoolboy's satchels a few rulers, imposingly termed irony, ambiguity, and paradox, and they promptly measure recent poems and novels with their inflexible and humorless instruments. They worship order, which is decreed to be organic structure. No metaphor has proved more misleading than that which likens a literary work to an organism with no superfluities, no waste, no discordance.

In truth, however, waste abounds in any human body, and even more in any spirit. Contradictions with oneself, as some psychologists assert, are the very mark of the civilized person. At the source of a work of art there often lie passion, disorder, chaos. The artist creates in order to find, or to force, some order into that chaos and to reach some clearer insight

into his darkness. Nevertheless, that striving for order is seldom totally successful; and the best in many a writer is not his attempt to turn into a literary engineer and build up a structured but cold and mechanical masterpiece for the critic to take to pieces at his heart's content; it lies in the lived experience of chaos, in the passionate formlessness which impelled him to create and seek a form. Formlessness (notwithstanding our subtlety, which insists on reducing it to a hidden structure perceptible only to the new critic) is the virtue of most great novels of the last two centuries, as well as of the second part of "Faust," or "A Season in Hell," or Claudel's poetry and Proust's fiction, in fact, almost all the modern American works which have any vitality. In the pregnant lines of Wordsworth's "Prelude" (I, 341-43), dear to some of our humanists who are overly jealous of their engineering colleagues, the adjectives "dark" and "inscrutable" are the key words, often forgotten:

. . . There is a dark  
 Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles  
 Discordant elements, makes them cling together  
 In one society.

Our new critics have concentrated on analyzing the works of the past, through what a young British author (who has little liking for them) has branded as "a form of necrophily." <sup>2</sup> They have, he says, "transferred their own dullness to something that was originally exciting." Their favorite sport of hunting out metaphors and symbols has naturally led them to prefer fiction. In the latter some vulgarity often must prevail, and this is synonymous with vitality; squeamish critics would reduce it to genteel old maidishness or ascribe it to profound intentions. Yet Balzac, Dickens, Whitman himself, Dostoevski, Zola, H. G. Wells, and most American novelists of the present age have shown not a little vulgarity. Many of them were in part hacks, writing fast to appease creditors and leaving a good deal to chance. The critic would be well advised to accept them, as well as their successors who at first appear to them as vulgar (as Céline, D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer) as they are. Only thus might he hope to exercise some influence on them if he began by accepting the impulse toward adventurousness and passionate self-assertion which caused them to create. The critic's function is certainly not to praise indiscriminately. Few artists value such praise. Their egotism

is less inflated than we might believe. They are grateful for honest dissent and for discerning appraisals of their achievement which point to flaws and denounce failures. After all, the role of a critic is not to bury a new work or to praise it, but to arouse discussion about it, to enhance our enjoyment of literature, and to impart pleasure to others. T. S. Eliot himself—the oracle of many of our analysts of literary structure and of our ingenious critics who add their own subtlety to that of a poet in order the better to marvel at it—did not balk at using the noble word “enjoyment.” In “The Sacred Wood,” he rightly defined the aim of literary study as that of helping us return to the work “with informed perception and intensified, because more conscious, enjoyment.” We need critics and reviewers who will not fear to be adventurous, to enlighten the public, to formulate judgments of value, and to write with zest and style. They will easily be found if we bridge the artificial gulf between the academics and the non-academics in America.

#### REFERENCES

1. We have treated this subject in length in our *Writers and Their Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1944), in which a number of the points taken up here are developed from a different angle. See also our essay, “The Criticism of Contemporary Writing,” in *Lectures in Criticism*, by several authors (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949), with an introduction by Huntington Cairns.
2. Anthony Cronin, “A Massacre of Authors,” *Encounter*, April 1956, pp. 25-32.

## *Some Animadversions on Current Reviewing*

THERE IS LITTLE more tiresome than the professional literary attack on the reviewer. Poets have always relished making them, especially when they were critics of any sort themselves. There are Pope's and Byron's rapiers, and Goethe's mallet: "*Schlagt ihn tot, den Hund! Es ist ein Rezensent*" ("Beat him to death, the dog! It does reviews"). Lichtenberg's famous *mot* about the book hitting the critic's head and the resultant hollow sound's not always being the fault of the book's interior condition has in recent years been modified. Complaints tend to run more in the direction of Randall Jarrell's essay, "An Age of Criticism" (there are too many heads being poked into the book-throwing room) or else to general attacks on the very institution of book-reviewing in America at the present time.

The great period of calumniating reviewers came before the modern re-mapping, by Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot and, in their separate ways, Lionel Trilling and F. R. Leavis, of the Domain of Criticism as a Moral Frontier. We tend today to feel that by and large the mere reviewer, as opposed to the critic, is unfair game, below the dignity of the hunt. Criticism in the academy has come close to supplanting philological scholarship as the loom of humanistic endeavor, and the net result of all this education should have been the spawning of literally hundreds of good practical critics, all performing well in reviews. This has not happened. At the risk of splashing about in the already heavily fished stream, I should like to rail at reviewing once again, and to make an outlandish suggestion as to how to improve its condition.

Whatever is wrong with reviewing in America has been growing steadily worse. Some years ago in an admirably even-tempered article in *Harper's*, Elizabeth Hardwick denounced the world of book-reviewing



in American mass publications with some claim to literate readership. Quoting Emerson's phrase, she described in some detail the "mush of concession" with which daily and weekly newspaper reviewing greets, and fails to confront, new books; she attacked the failure of critical responsibility, the poor writing, and even the denaturing of the *expertise* of perfectly competent critics when they occasionally write for weeklies with large circulation.

Miss Hardwick was merely pointing out what scholars and writers of real seriousness have known and bemoaned for some time. By and large, they have continued to shrug hopelessly and to cast envious glances at the standards of reviewing maintained by the *London Times Literary Supplement* (despite never-ending quarrels about the merits and defects of its policy of anonymity for reviewers), by the *Observer*, the *Spectator*, and the *New Statesman*. The irony of all this is that one still finds more than a trace of anti-Americanism in even the most scholarly of British reviews: whereas it has gradually become an accepted fact that Americans may have something to say about the Renaissance or Shakespeare—for example, certain recent studies in the English Romantic poets have been reviewed in England with more than a hint of hostility toward their provenance. An additional irony is provided by the growing tendency of American academic readers to take the *T. L. S.* reviews far more seriously than they are taken by their envied English counterparts.

The use of the English literate community as a gauge by which to measure the deficiencies of American reviewing naturally poses many problems. When Henry James made his famous observation about "the complex fate" of being an American who always had to struggle against his tendency to overvalue Europe, he was talking as much about the American imagination in general as about his own extremely complicated émigré career. But there is surely an application of his observation to the specific problem of public literary culture: the grass looks much greener abroad. Even when one knows the relevant facts about circulation figures (the number of sold copies, here and in Britain, needed to pay publication costs on a new work of fiction, for example), and even when one is able to interpret these in the light of the tightness of England's little island, the American will still secretly feel that British reviewing of books, theaters, art and music has managed to finesse the horrors of the official middle-brow dreariness that hangs over the analogous scene in his own country. A certain amount of this feeling is to be discounted. In the first

place, our own intellectual vulgarity is always easier to perceive than that of England or France. In the second place, where the realm of the Word is concerned, England is still our Academy, for better or worse.

Matthew Arnold once pointed out that the idea of a French sort of literary Academy was antithetical to the more pragmatic and flexible English spirit. And yet the book-consuming England of today, itself a far cry from the tightly closed world of literary London before World War II, looks to many Americans today to be positively aristocratic. If in England the Establishment is under fire, the very weapons being used against it remain the property of a continuing Establishment of the Mind, which in any event gives some evidence of appearing to be in control of the printed page.

It is obvious, however, that the most important cause of our widespread journalistic Anglophilia lies in our own shortcomings. Miss Hardwick made an eloquent plea for some revision of the current system of reviewing in American newspapers and large-circulation magazines; since she made it, the specific abuses she delineated have only increased. One need not cover again the ground that she laid bare. An analysis of a sample review written by one of the two mainstays of the daily *New York Times* would yield an effort that would be graded somewhere between C and C— in a sophomore class. So would a demonstration of his colleague's untiring puritanic vigilance, the greatest critical success of which has so far consisted in promoting peripheral readership for serious novels about which he has little to say other than that their view of life is tawdry and negative (that is, sexually conscious). Little could be gained by this, however. Nobody who really feels that Messrs. Orville Prescott and Charles Poore are masters of their craft would be convinced by such demonstrations, nor would he even be reading the sort of periodical in which they might be published. The defects of the *New York Times Book Review* are table talk even among those who write for it. That the relatively high standards of reviewing, set and still maintained by the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, the *Reporter*, *Commentary*, and a few other periodicals go for little because of their restricted circulation or somewhat parochial field of interest is a truism. Similarly, it has been obvious for some time that there is an increasing gap between the academic mode of criticism, as practiced in the literary quarterlies and professional journals, and the quality of periodical reviewing as such. The more the first has come to join or even replace philological scholarship as an academic

institution in the literary humanistic disciplines, the less of a beneficial effect has it had on more public writing. At the very best, the ghosts of theories and critical catchwords of twenty years ago will hover about a reviewer's language (*Time*, with its almost indescribable, self-conscious style is a good example); the effect is to make of even the most pretentious reviewing a kind of critical *Kitsch*.

While it is the problem of book-reviewing in particular with which Miss Hardwick is engaged, it might be remarked that music and art notices are, as far as the large-circulation periodicals are concerned, in as sorry a shape. The *New Yorker*, for example, once retained perhaps the most distinguished American man of letters of our day, Edmund Wilson, as its regular book reviewer. That same magazine now seems to take pride in the fact that its current music critic is unable to say anything about a work of twentieth-century music other than (a) that it stimulated his emotions or (b) that it did not. Since Eric Salzman left the *New York Times*, no one remains on the staff of that paper who is capable of more than assessing the quality of performance of the traditional concert repertory, no one from whom one can learn the slightest. Bernard Haggin, despite his frequently ungraceful didacticism, is perhaps the one music reviewer we have who has in any way carried on the Shavian tradition of appreciating the morality of the act of musical performance. He should be doing quotidian reviewing; it is good at least to find him regularly writing on recordings for the *New Republic*; but for some years his writing had been receding into the monthly and quarterly press. The *New York Times* is a superlative newspaper. It is rather shocking to discover that, as far as its reviews are concerned, expertise and real competence seem suspect to the editors.

Often, however, technical competence in some field is brought to bear on a review with deplorable results. A particular case is the way that weekly, monthly, or even quarterly periodicals alike handle reviews of poetry. There are many difficulties here. Despite much high-minded rhetoric to the contrary, new books of poems are not much read. When they are, it is usually to the accompaniment of echoes from the college literature class. Either new books of verse are not reviewed at all, or they are written about by other poets. The result is a lot of mutual taking-in of washing and clique reputation-mongering, all without seeming embarrassment. The idea behind all this is that many critics of fiction and belles lettres feel incapable of talking about a new book of poems, that

academics who might want to will be too academic, and that the whole affair had best be left to the poets themselves. In this connection, one might want to reject Tocqueville's observation that "democracy infuses a taste for letters among the trading classes," only half-maliciously observing that he was more accurate than he could have known when he added that it also "introduces a trading spirit into literature." Poetry has always been the form of literature most deeply absorbed in a dialogue with its own history. A casual glance at the occasional reviews of books of verse appearing in the *Sunday Times* or *Tribune* (and never on Monday!) would lead one to suspect that the world of poetry is nothing but a kind of court conversation among contemporaries, "not" (like the book of himself shown to Hermann Hesse's alienated Steppenwolf) "for everybody."

Here, too, there have been exceptions. Most of the essays collected in Randall Jarrell's "Poetry and the Age" are spirited, informed and vastly accessible to the lay reader. They appeared throughout the late 'forties in weeklies and quarterlies. The very idea of his doing a piece once a month or so for the daily *Times* would have shocked the journalistic professionalism of its editors. Far better, it would seem, a graduate of a newspaper city desk with nothing in particular to say than an interloping aesthete, perhaps with an ax to grind.

Then there is, as Miss Hardwick points out, the question of coverage. The *Sunday Times* book section seems to assign space and relative prominence to reviews of books on the basis of their expected circulation or, occasionally, of their thorough respectability. Very often, of course, this coincides rather embarrassingly with the amount of advertising space purchased by the publisher of the book. Technical works in the natural and social sciences, bound volumes of political journalism, books on sport or the arts are very often reviewed by a member of the daily *Times* staff who normally covers news in that area. Sometimes they will be assigned to an academic known to be "safe," in the sense that he will write casually, rather than with urgency, that he will be bland, rather than just. Last year one was surprised to find a front-page review in the *Sunday Times* by Miss Hardwick herself of Oscar Lewis' "The Children of Sanchez"; no matter how literary its program, this was a work of anthropology, and its assignment represented unusual flexibility and sensitivity to the book's contents. What makes the London *T. L. S.* so attractive, despite its many faults, can be shown in part by a comparison of the books regularly

chosen for "lead" and "front" space there with the analogous choices for its American counterpart.

Another such comparison is as significant as it is tempting to make. The letters to the editor that appear each week differ startlingly as between the New York and London weekly book sections. The *T. L. S.* letters are often cantankerous; the controversies they engender and sustain seem never to die; but the rash of letters that breaks out over its New York analogue whenever a "controversial" piece has been run is much more depressing. Too often one finds a blend of mindlessness and pointlessness, uneasy self-assertion on the part of the correspondents. Evelyn Waugh once caught up the whole spirit of the indignant British letter-to-the-editor with the ringing and archetypal phrase, "in this so-called twentieth century." The American equivalent would often seem to be, "Look, Ma, I'm in print; therefore Mr. X is wrong." One would falsely conclude that the readerships of the two reviewing journals represent startlingly different levels of sophistication.

It is rather the case, though, that the more articulate portion of the American public has been abashed into silence. If the letters to the editor do not do much more than help this to snowball, other features are at work from the beginning. The full-page advertisements for printed matter guaranteeing success in getting rich, thin, or the most out of love (one feels that these belong among the offerings of pimple removers toward the back of the magazine section); the "Queries and Answers" department, which seems to consist almost completely of requests for the source of Wordsworth's or Yeats' most famous lines or of newspaper doggerel from 1910; the publishing-gossip column, gleaming in the light reflected from the best-seller lists across the page, coating with the cheer of a Rotarian the condescension of an under-secretary. Somehow the tone of all this gets to drone through the reviews themselves. Whether the standards sag because of the reviewers assigned, or because the first-rate critics produce weak performances (perhaps to get into the spirit of the whole thing), the fact remains that a reviewing periodical we all depend on so much is almost too easy to ridicule.

And so it goes. The question as to why we do not have better book reviews in our large-circulation journals (I mean really those with medium circulation but with some authority) would appear to be a corollary to another one; but the question as to why the periodicals in which our better reviews appear do not as a rule achieve even that medium circula-

tion (above 100,000) is a very different matter. A latent confusion of the two problems seems to be lurking somewhere behind the only excuses offered for the otherwise seemingly pointless irresponsibility of the editors. Questions of the economics of publishing look as if they contained the answer, but they really do not.

Perhaps it can be put another way. In the almost futile and one-sided debate on the subject of mass culture, that has occupied intellectual critics ever since World War II, there has been no resolution of the basic economic problem of the necessity for a broad-based distribution of cultural commodities. A writer as persuasive and amusing as Dwight Macdonald will point out (most recently in his "Masscult and Midcult") that the intellectual standards of even the loftier publications ("slick" magazines and the like) have become terribly debased, even though their circulation figures never approach those of the true "mass culture" media. He will be answered, if at all, with what is essentially the same appeal to the concept of "box-office" that a film producer in the 'thirties would have made. The short exchange reduces finally to something like this. Intellectual: "All this is horrible." Producer: "But if it were better it wouldn't sell, and there couldn't be any at all." Mr. Macdonald most recently directed his fire against the few institutions who in effect have been saying, "Well, we're better, and we sell a little."

I should like to raise a point that seems to have been ignored. Taking for granted for a moment the necessity for a large-scale circulation of periodicals, and postulating the slightly more problematic principle that a publication cannot be too good in order to sell widely, we might then observe that a situation arises that calls for what is almost a moral imperative. Where one is constrained by economic factors to yield, he must yield or be silenced; but where one has a degree of freedom from these considerations, he is morally obliged to exercise it. In other words, wherever the editor of a middle-brow periodical has a captive audience, he must shift his sights above their heads. In a paper-printing culture like ours, there is an entropy of excellence, which must wherever possible be pumped back into the system, at points where words are being exchanged and weakened.

It seems to me that the whole problem of reviewing is a perfect case in point. The editors of the *New York Times* seem to take the professionalist attitude that if book and art and music reviewing were really first-rate, then thousands upon thousands of outraged enemies of culture

would switch to another paper. For all one knows, this is what Lester Markel, the editor of the *Sunday Times*, actually thinks, and although he tolerates first-rate writing (often in "The News of the Week in Review" section and in the *Times* food column by Craig Claiborne—would that the daily book reviewers wrote as elegantly as he!), he appears to feel that a weekly book-review section even as good as the *T. L. S.* would utterly violate a sense of the *Sunday Times* as a "family" newspaper.

One has only to imagine an editorial conference in which the *Times* decided to drop the bridge editor or their regular writer on chess because of his oversophistication to see the trouble with all this. Book reviews, like the chess column, exist for people who really care about them. Those who do not may pass them up, just as I, for example, pass up the resort section on Sundays. The publishers' advertising, things being what they are, is in a sense captive, too; it is hard to believe that even the full-page advertisements for "shockers" would be withdrawn if the books they were hawking were reviewed with more contempt and more vigor than they currently are. If, on the other hand, the character of the book-reviewing in both daily and weekly papers is solely a function of the demands of advertisers, then everything should be more above board. In France, for example, it is a common practice for reviewers and even editors of literary journals to be employees of particular publishing houses, whose books they manage somehow to promote in the reviews they write. Perhaps it is this dual allegiance which produces a uniquely French sort of book notice, fraught with dialectic produced not by the complexity of the ideas in the book but by the complexity of the reviewer's task. I do not feel that this is yet the case here, however. As far as any particular section of a newspaper is concerned, then, there is always a captive audience, and in the case of the Sunday book section, there is probably captive advertising too.

Perhaps this is an example of what the late C. Wright Mills called "crackpot realism." In any event, it is in just such refusals as this to see where they are free to allow for excellence that the producers of Dwight Macdonald's "Midcult" commodities are perhaps to be blamed. But it is doubtful that any amount of blaming, however justified, can have any good effect. It may be wrong, after all, to speak of the *Times* and *Tribune* book sections, or the periodical that used to be called the *Saturday Review of Literature*, as being analogues of the *T. L. S.* or the book sections of the *Spectator* or the *New Statesman* in any way at all. It may be that we

must abandon any hope of improvement whatsoever, that wherever a commercial periodical venture is concerned the superstition will prevail that every part of the "book," as magazine editors call it, must anticipate even the nonexistent objections of readers who will skip over it anyway. There would therefore be only one recommendation that might in all honesty be made.

The half-ridiculous, half-endearing cry, "Let's start a magazine," is one we usually associate with being either twenty-two or else in desperate exile, far from a metropolis. As far as reviewing is concerned, we may in a sense be in the second category. It is certainly extremely difficult to stimulate the enthusiasm of the first one. Perhaps we are dealing with a specific situation in which, despite the low batting-average of those who since the 'twenties have taken up their own challenge, some results might be accomplished. I am not proposing a modest undertaking; we already have excellent critical writing in quarterlies and the small-circulation weeklies. What is needed is a weekly periodical devoted to book reviews (and perhaps to film, music, and art chronicles also), and with a circulation well over 100,000 across the country. It should have an editorial board to produce the publication, and a separate advisory board, working part-time, to do the vital work of assigning space to books, and reviews to reviewers, as well as combing the nation for competent, spirited, and willing reviewers. These would probably continue to be academics, journalists (although I suspect fewer of them than are currently put to work at reviewing by the newspapers), and novelists; scientists who can and do write would have to be recruited from the pages of professional journals like *Science*. Payment for writing would have to exceed the literary quarterlies by at least fivefold. None of the reviewers would have to be put in the position of being "regulars," lest they stagnate, nor must they be overworked, lest they come to view writing for the magazine as a chore. The orientation of the whole enterprise must by no means be exclusively literary, and its commitment should always be to the life of the mind, its sole *raison d'être*.

At a casual estimate, this would cost at least \$750,000 a year. The leading foundations who have been making huge grants for academic and creative work should support it, if only to protect their previous investments. Up till now, their policy on the whole has been never to line up solidly behind a particular publication, but rather to give to individuals or institutions money which will eventually be refined into print. If they



were to forego their timidity or uncertainty in the case of a weekly review, it would be a master stroke of self-realization. Medical and other technological crash research programs aside, there could be no better way of directly expending money to improve cultural and intellectual morale.

No doubt by such a means American reviewing would be astonishingly improved. The elevation in intellectual morale mentioned earlier might be discernible at first only among the reviewers themselves; but it would soon be transmitted to those being reviewed, and eventually to those who read. This increase of morale would be far more important than assuaging the feelings of those whom newspapers probably consider superliterate. As it now stands, aside from formal critical notices in the small-circulation magazines, some of the very best reviewing in the country gets done informally, for minute audiences, in democratic mock salons in universities and large cities. If our public reviewing were to reach the level of our literary gossip, we would be putting a better foot forward than we do, as a national culture, right now.

As Byron once observed apropos of Keats, it is hard to believe that the mind, "that very fiery particle,/Should let itself be snuff'd out by an article." Nobody suffers for too long a time from a hostile review, but there is nothing so depressing to the whole intellectual enterprise than being praised by a man one feels is a fool, in a periodical whose tone, style, and gestures of assent can only embarrass. The whole point of this complaint has been that things are not as bad as they seem, but that there is no excuse for the untoward appearance. It is not only the Europeans of whom Tocqueville was thinking but also ourselves, who in moments of outrage suppose such betrayals of excellence to be a "natural and inevitable result of equality." They are not; but they certainly tend to be accidental results, and there is no excuse, with so much energy about (again in Tocqueville's words) for the human mind to "find its beacon lights grow dim." The ultimate result of fog is an increase of darkness.

## A Review: *Catch-22*

Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*.

New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961: 443 pp.

WE ARE INFORMED on the jacket of "Catch-22" that the author has attended New York University and Columbia, and has been a Fulbright student at Oxford. He has taught (English, I fear) at Pennsylvania State College and is now a "promotion executive." The term is no doubt a genteelism, less sinister than it sounds, meaning only that Mr. Heller is passing through the *Purgatorio* of the advertising man in his ascent from the *Inferno* of the teacher to the *Paradisio* of the creative artist. His age, thirty-eight in 1961, makes it possible that he served in the Second World War or in Korea, but if so he has found it unnecessary to levy upon personal experience. His war book derives from other war books, the movies, the stage, television, and current fashions in sans-culottism. He worked upon it from 1953. A copyright date of 1955, in addition to that of 1961, suggests that early precautions were taken lest its treasures be rifled. The portrait of the author on the jacket shows a countenance handsome, healthy, and relaxed—perfect icon of *l'homme moyen sensuel*.

Since books not worth reading are not worth reviewing and "Catch-22" is worthless, my review needs justification. I will supply it in conclusion. Meanwhile it may be viewed as a protest against the means by which I was fubbed, an advertisement containing twenty-three testimonials to the superlative quality of Mr. Heller's book. Four of these were anonymous quotes from mass media (*Time*, *Newsday*, *Newsweek*, Associated Press) which seemed to support the identified speakers with the voice of the people which is also the voice of God. Of the identified speakers, about half were professional wind-raisers for the publishing industry and its captive journals. I am not bitter about these. To sustain themselves in the needy world of book-page journalism they must review more books than they read, and no doubt end many a working day with plaintive speculations: surely there must be *some* way of earning an honest living. It was by the nonprofessional enthusiasts that I was, in all senses of the word, sold. One

was A. J. Liebling, whom I had assessed as a man not easily exploited. Another was a professor who, by unlucky coincidence, shares a surname with one of Mr. Heller's asinine villains. I know him to be neither villain nor ass. Indeed none of the testifiers need be thought of as wicked or stupid men. They share in the prevalent confusion which I shall deal with at the end. And they are generous. It may not have occurred to them that, in supporting a raid on my purse and leisure, they were being generous with time and money not their own.

Nelson Algren ("the best"), Orville Prescott ("wildly original"), Robert Brustein ("superlative work"), Merle Miller ("it grabbed me"), Irwin Shaw ("congratulations"), *Time* ("written with brilliance"), Walt Kelly ("a very funny man"), James Jones ("marvelous"), Morris West ("wonderful"), Art Buchwald ("one of the greatest," nota bene, "in a cable from Paris"), Alexander King ("wit, grace, and intellectual awareness"), *Newsday* ("wonderful"), Selden Rodman ("devastatingly comic"), Oscar Cargill ("wonderful"), Ernest K. Gann ("the finest"), Harper Lee ("the only war novel"), Associated Press ("something special"), Leo Lerman ("our Swift"), *Newsweek* ("great power"), Maurice Dolbier ("hilarious, raging, exhilarating," etc.), A. J. Liebling ("the best"), Gladwyn Hill ("may become a classic"), Seymour Epstein ("nothing less than a fantastic experience").

The above may not serve to cast me in the role of David against Goliath, but it should prove that I am not striking a man who is down. I must add one more defensive note. Institutional rivalry has nothing to do with my estimate of "Catch-22." Its author might have passed through my own university as he has through New York University, Columbia, and Oxford, unscathed by education. He is a phenomenon of our times, when a fair percentage of students prepare themselves to shape our culture by proving impervious to culture, and to use the tool of language by acquiring no skill with languages. A writer need not learn to write; he still can make his mark.

Before describing the theme of "Catch-22" I must make this point which I trust will not be considered trifling—that its author cannot write. My page references are designed to let the reader check, if he wishes, the fact that the specimens offered truly exist and are typical of the style of their context. In most of the book the question of style scarcely arises. Its pages are filled with dialogue of the type which television comedians blame on their "writers," with the skits linked by brief paragraphs in the simple-

style-dogmatic of the post-Hemingway era. Flat assertions succeed each other with the engaging rhythm of a slapping screen-door. It is when the author aspires to vivid or "fine" writing that we get a taste of his quality. Journalese emerges as the basic language, whole sentences consisting of clichés punctuated by proper names: "Even though Chief White Halfcoat kept busting Colonel Moodus in the nose for General Dreedle's benefit, he was still outside the pale" (page 57). Inevitably there follows the car which "slammed to a screeching stop inches short" of something or other. The author's way of breaking the cliché barrier is to supply all nouns with adjectives, frequently in strings: "He was a sad, birdlike man with the spatulate face and scrubbed, tapering features of a well-groomed rat" (21). If "spatulate" still means "broad and flat," it creates certain anatomical difficulties when used in connection with the "tapering features" of a rat; perhaps this is a form of ambivalence. Mr. Heller returns for another look at this face: "He had a dark complexion and a small, wise, saturnine face with mournful pouches under both eyes" (32). Observe the helpful word "both"—serving those of us accustomed to faces with pouches under only one eye. Recalling the curious rat which this character resembled, we trust that the pouches were like the features, "tapered," and not like the face, "spatulate," and that they sagged under "both" beady eyes.

Mr. Heller's special genius is for selecting not the wrong word but the one which is not quite right, as when he describes one of his Italian beauties as having "incandescent blue veins converging populously beneath her cocoa-colored skin where the flesh is most tender" (24). Obviously she was well-peopled with veins, but their "converging beneath" her skin leaves us puzzled about where they diverged—surely not, cilia-like, *above* her skin nor yet at her stout whore's heart. In any event she would have been, as all women were to Hungry Joe, a "lovely, satisfying, maddening manifestation of the miraculous" (52). As women to Hungry Joe, so alliteration to Mr. Heller. I will leave this matter of style after quoting, without comment, two sentences which Mr. Heller himself might wish to offer in evidence of his "power and commanding skill" (*Newsweek*), his "grace, and intellectual awareness" (King):

That was where he wanted to be if he had to be there at all, instead of hung out there in front like some goddam cantilevered goldfish in some goddam cantilevered goldfish bowl while the goddam foul black tiers of flak were bursting and booming and billowing all around and above and below him in a climbing, cracking, staggered, banging, phantasmagorical,

cosmological wickedness that jarred and tossed and shivered, clattered and pierced, and threatened to annihilate them all in one splinter of a second in one vast flash of fire [48].

Along the ground suddenly, on both sides of the path, he saw dozens of new mushrooms the rain had spawned poking their nodular fingers up through the clammy earth like lifeless stalks of flesh, sprouting in such necrotic profusion everywhere he looked that they seemed to be proliferating right before his eyes [42].

"Catch-22" is about American aviators based on a Mediterranean island in 1945. The bombardier Yossarian is a reluctant hero who wants to be grounded but is kept flying ever more missions by his ambitious superior, Colonel Cathcart, until he resolves to desert to Sweden. The title is explained by the following (and many more) dialogues:

Yossarian looked at him soberly and tried another approach. "Is Orr crazy?"

"He sure is," Doc Daneeka said.

"Can you ground him?"

"I sure can. But first he has to ask me to. That's part of the rule."

"Then why doesn't he ask you to?"

"Because he's crazy," Doc Daneeka said. "He has to be crazy to keep flying combat missions after all the close calls he's had. Sure, I can ground Orr. But first he has to ask me to."

"That's all he has to do to be grounded?"

"That's all. Let him ask me."

"And then you can ground him?" Yossarian asked.

"No. Then I can't ground him."

"You mean there's a catch?"

"Sure there's a catch," Doc Daneeka replied, "Catch-22. Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn't really crazy" [45].

For readers who have found the above insufficiently explicit, several paragraphs succeed, exploring the subtleties of the term "in all its spinning reasonableness." The philosophical message of the book is that sane people are crazy and crazy people sane. The incantatory power of the word "crazy" is relentlessly exploited, in harmony with those stirring slogans of our day, Crazy, man, crazy! Mad, Mad, Mad!

The term is finally extended to include all the sly ruses of organized society, designed to frustrate natural and sensible men like Yossarian, who asks only to be left alone so that he may feed like the python and try to

match the sexual prowess of the Japanese beetle: "Yossarian gorged himself in the mess hall until he thought he would explode and then sagged back in a contented stupor, his mouth filmy with a succulent residue" (21). I omit illustration of how he "bangs" women in rapid succession, but lest I seem to be acting in restraint of trade, let me certify that "Catch-22" contains as many four-letter words as any rival product and that women in it only as objects of lust, whether Wacs, nurses, officers' wives, or Italian prostitutes and countesses.

The book tells no story. It alternates serially, by means of the "advanced" technique of fragmented structure, five standard routines: I, Hospital routine, with malingering soldiers and incompetent staff; II, Combat routine, with everything snafu, yet missions accomplished with negligent gallantry; III, Funny fraud routine, involving army supplies and G.I. tycoon; IV, Red tape routine, at training center and headquarters; V, Leave in Rome routine, with orgies. The last is the only one of a type unavailable to television viewers, the elder of whom must console themselves with fond memories of the penny-in-the-slot movie, "Ladies' Night in a Turkish Bath," where everyone ran around naked.

There are no characters. The puppets are given funny names and features, but cannot be visualized or distinguished from one another except by association with their prototypes. Sergeant Bilko, Colonel Blimp (and Captain Whizbang) are immanent and circumambient, their spirit, like Yossarian in his plane, moving over the face of the waters. The character-names range from the subtly whimsical (General Dreedle) to the mercilessly side-splitting (Milo Minderbinder and Dori Duz, who, as Mr. Heller and his publisher carefully explain, "does.") Alliteration is rife: General P. P. Peckem, Colonel Cathcart, Colonel Cargill, Colonel Korn, Major Metcalf. One character surnamed "Major" has received from his cruel father the given name "Major" and since he is now a Major in the army, he is Major Major Major. He must have picked up a middle name when my attention lagged since one of Mr. Heller's chapters is titled "Major Major Major Major" at which point our laughter becomes uncontrollable. In this world, of course, Texans are bores, Iowans rubes, chaplains feeble, doctors hypochondriac, and officers increasingly contemptible as they rise in rank until we reach generals, who are effete. The copying of every available stereotype, and the failure to find in the whole range of humanity anything new to draw illustrates the author's indifference to people. We can see no one because he has seen no one.

The forms of verbal wit are limited to two. The first consists of self-contradictory statements which may or may not be meaningful. This might be called the Plain Man's Paradox or Everybody's Epigram since the fact that a sally of wit has been attempted is inescapable: "... the games were so interesting they were foolish" (9); "Nately had a bad start. He came from a good family" (12); "... the finest, least dedicated man in the whole world" (14); "And if that wasn't funny, there were lots of things that weren't even funnier" (17); "Failure often did not come easily" (27); "He was a self-made man who owed his lack of success to nobody" (27); "He had decided to live forever or die in the attempt" (29); "... never sees anyone in his office while he's in his office" (105); "... she was irresistible, and men edged away from her carefully" (213); "This ... old man reminded Nately of his father because the two were nothing at all alike" (239); "He did not hate his mother and father, even though they had both been very good to him" (243). This last, like several others of the hundreds in the book, comes near to being a hit, but Mr. Heller, as usual, kills it by the wrong kind of "milking." He proceeds to lambaste the mother and father for snobbishness. After gazing apathetically at the constant shower of sparks rising from Mr. Heller's "mordant intelligence" (Brustein), we are amazed to come upon this:

"My only fault," he observed with practical good humor, watching for the effect of his words, "is that I have no faults."

Colonel Scheisskopf didn't laugh, and General Peckem was stunned [313].

General Peckem and Author Heller are brothers under the skin after all (as are Colonel Scheisskopf and I). The striving for paradox often takes the form of extended statement ending in a "snapper." A review of intellectual attainments will end "In short, he was a dope" (67), or a list of virtuous traits with "I hate that son of a bitch" (18). There is much multiplying of negatives, as in the comment on the farmer paid for not raising crops, which alone might well have been eight years in the making (82). It is designed for those who have never had this joke in a large enough portion.

Mr. Heller's other resource is echolalia. This is a device best illustrated in one of its traditional settings, the minstrel show:

Interlocutor: Bones, who was that lady I saw you out with last night?

Bones: Who was that lady you saw me out with last night?

Interlocutor: Yes, Bones. Who was that lady I saw you out with last night?

Bones: That was no lady. That was my wife.

Mr. Heller employs some form of echolalia on every page. Usually it is pointless:

"You're a chaplain," he exclaimed ecstatically. "I didn't know you were a chaplain."

"Why yes," the chaplain answered. "Didn't you know I was a chaplain?"

"Why, no: I didn't know you were a chaplain" [13].

Sometimes it italicizes a joke, on the remote chance that we have not heard it, like the one showing dignitaries so ignorant that they fail to recognize the name of a famous author:

"Well, what did he say?"

"'T. S. Eliot,'" Colonel Cargill informed him.

"What's that?"

"'T. S. Eliot,'" Colonel Cargill repeated.

"Just 'T. S.—'"

"Yes, sir. That's all he said. Just 'T. S. Eliot.'"

"I wonder what it means," General Peckem reflected. Colonel Cargill wondered too.

"'T. S. Eliot,'" General Peckem mused.

"'T. S. Eliot,'" Colonel Cargill echoed with the same funereal puzzlement [36].

(Could this be what Professor Cargill has in mind when he testifies, "Heller writes the freshest dialogue since the advent of Hemingway thirty years ago"?)

The device sometimes retreats coyly into simple redundance, as in the repeated "Texan from Texas," sometimes rises in triumph to what in balladry would be called "incremental repetition":

"All right, I'll dance with you," she said, before Yossarian could even speak. "But I won't let you sleep with me."

"Who asked you?" Yossarian asked her.

"You don't want to sleep with me?" she exclaimed with surprise.

"I don't want to dance with you."

Then, after a descriptive paragraph, comes:

"All right. I will let you buy me dinner. But I won't let you sleep with me."



"Who asked you?" Yossarian asked with surprise.

"You don't want to sleep with me?"

"I don't want to buy you dinner" [152].

What Mr. Heller prizes most he echoes most assiduously. An all-out effort to describe a "lush" nurse is provided twice on the same page in almost the same words (213). There are a number of "Yes, sir—No, sir" sequences, including one where a colonel with "a big fat mustache" is bullying subordinates:

"Don't interrupt."

"Yes, sir."

"And say 'sir' when you do," ordered Major Metcalf.

"Yes, sir."

"Weren't you told not to interrupt?"

This goes on for five pages (74-79). At one point in "Catch-22" a character says of another, "He must be getting delirious. . . . He keeps saying the same thing over and over again" (182). To signalize so any special character in this "contrapuntal masterpiece" (A. J. Liebling) is unfair discrimination. One indubitable advantage of chronic echolalia is that it stretches the book to 443 crown octavo pages, price \$5.95.

Nothing is easier than to blast a book, especially a sitting turkey, and, ordinarily, nothing more gratuitous. There will always be vulgar and noisy authors vulgarly and noisily praised, and ill-written, uncreative, and tedious books for which the proprietors can drum up a clique. What gives the present enterprise its special significance is the peculiar kind of pretentiousness involved, and the dislocation in literary and moral standards encouraging this kind of pretentiousness. The appalling fact is that author, publisher, and reviewers seem unaware that the book is destructive and immoral, and are able to add to their economic and other delights in it, gratifying sensations of righteousness. There is the real "catch" in "Catch-22."

The identity of the book as non-art may be illustrated by a single detail. In the hospital where Yossarian malingers is a so-called "soldier in white" whose limbs are in traction and whose body is swathed in bandages except for holes where he breathes and where tubes enter for intravenous feeding and kidney drainage. Before he dies, this "soldier in white" becomes one of Mr. Heller's comic props. On page 10 we read:

When the jar on the floor was full, the jar feeding his elbow was empty, and the two were simply switched quickly so that the stuff could drip back into him.

In a word, he is being fed his own urine. On page 168 this brutal fancy is repeated, in the usual two sentences where one would do:

Changing the jars for the soldier in white was no trouble at all, since the same clear fluid was dripped back inside him over and over again with no apparent loss. When the jar feeding the inside of his elbow was just about empty, the jar on the floor was just about full, and the two were simply uncoupled from their respective hoses and reversed quickly so that the liquid could be dripped right back into him.

"Catch-22," says Orville Prescott, "will not be forgotten by those who can take it." Why should we wish to take it?

The issue here is an artistic, not a moral, one. There is in art, current notions to the contrary, such a thing as decorum, propriety, fitness—a necessary correspondence between matter and mode. No kind of matter is denied the artist, providing he finds the right mode and possesses the right skills. Swift might have been able to adapt the matter of the "soldier in white" to the mode of satire as he adapted the idea of butchering Irish babies for the English meat market in his "Modest Proposal." Swift's persona is consistent and *serious*, the powerful thrust of the piece deriving from his frightening obtuseness; the material, as it must be in such a risky case, is under perfect control, the intention unmistakable. Heller, *pace* Leo Lerman, is not "our Swift." His conception of satire, if he has one, is that it is any mixture of the repellent and ridiculous, and so he keeps pelting us from his bag of merry japes. Suffering and death are not fit subjects for his mode and talents, and neither is juvenile pimping in Rome. It is not that we are horrified by his "soldier in white." We are a little disgusted and greatly bored. The jokes are there to prevent us from taking the figure seriously, and the figure is there to prevent us from taking the jokes as jokes even if they were good. The result is vacuum. Whatever else it may be, art may not be vacuous.

The adolescent gourmet who wants a mixture of everything at the soda-fountain, assuming that if each of ten things is good the ten together will be ten times as good, grows up and consigns such mixtures to the garbage pail. Too many of our newsprint arbiters of taste have not grown up, or have found it expedient to reverse the process. They accept the assump-

tions which a Mr. Heller accepts and mix their adjectives as he mixes his ingredients: "brilliantly comic—brutally gruesome" (Prescott), "funniest—saddest" (Miller), "uproarious—horrifying" (Shaw). They are put in mind of hypothetical collaborations. Seymour Epstein proposes Dante, Kafka, and Abbott & Costello. I have not, as I trust Mr. Epstein has done, given my days and nights to the study of Dante, but I have read him. Between Dante and Heller I detect no resemblance. Robert Brustein assembles a cast of half a dozen serious and comic authors as the composite Heller, and adds "A Night at the Opera" which, as a matter of fact, is art of a higher order. This is a game all may easily play, and if given time they might have found Heller a fusion of Stephen Crane and P. G. Wodehouse, Shakespeare and Ezra Pound, Louisa May Alcott and James Joyce, St. Paul and Henry Miller. What they fail to see is that plus and minus numerals add up to zero, that the indiscriminate mixture of colors gives not the spectrum of the rainbow but the brown of mud. Their level of critical thinking finds perfect expression in Walt Kelly's ineffable words: Heller "has quarterbacked a passion play through the left side of the line for all the marbles."

In addition to arbitrary mixture, formlessness and excess are being increasingly accepted as the badge of "true art." Because Heller's book reads as if the pages of the manuscript had been scrambled on the way to the printer, it is viewed as experimental and "modern"—like the work of the painter who squirts colors on the side of a barn with a firehose and thus triumphs in a new "technique." The idea has still failed to penetrate that formlessness is not a new kind of form, and that true modern art is not formless. The ideal of excess is explicitly stated by one of Heller's contemporaries writing of another. Updike in praising Salinger has said that the mark of the true artist is the "willingness to risk excess on behalf of [his] obsessions." Our timid demurrer that a few true artists have risked moderation on behalf of their insights is irrelevant in the present context. The interest of Updike's dictum is the evidence it provides that artistry is being defined in terms of *differentia* and that *genus* is being forgotten. Artistry, we had supposed, was mastery of materials, the ability of certain unusual people to arrange the right things in the right order, words, or sounds, or colors and shapes; but if excess and obsession are its mark, we must revise our notions and accept the fact that membership in the society of artists is wide open. Although Updike and Salinger write far better than he, they will have to admit Heller. Perhaps it should be put the other

way around. Salinger was one of those mentioned as incorporated in Heller. Updike did not make the grade.

Those who can mistake non-art for art can mistake immorality for morality. My word immorality applies, of course, to Mr. Heller's book, not his personal character or literary intentions. In assessing the response of the reviewers, I realize that I am dealing with excerpts, but I have made sure that these excerpts predicate; no amount of hedging in the unquoted portions of the critiques would alter the implications. The Associated Press excerpt contains the usual bullying sentence: "If you have no imagination you won't understand it." I have imagination and I understand it. I have observed that "Catch-22" contains trace elements of decency. Mr. Heller avoids scatological and homosexual humor, for which I thank him, and he dedicates his book to his mother, wife and children. Although during its "heart-stopping moments" (West) my heart beat steadily on, I know where they are supposed to be—indeed, in my initial exposure to the book, was looking for them longingly, desperately. Yossarian sorrows over the death of rear-gunner Snowden in spite of the clever pun "Where are the Snowdens of yesteryear?" and the neat turn given the account of his wound:

Here was God's plenty, all right, he thought bitterly as he stared—liver, lungs, kidneys, ribs, stomach and bits of the stewed tomatoes Snowden had eaten that day for lunch. Yossarian hated stewed tomatoes and turned away dizzily and began to vomit [429].

Yossarian wishes to rescue "Nateley's whore's kid sister" from the brothel, even though earlier she has been hilariously portrayed as completely adapted to environment. The humble family visiting Yossarian in the hospital is kindly, even though they insist on mistaking him for someone else. Although Yossarian is quite the village atheist, Mr. Heller's pile-driver satire comes down less heavily on the chaplain than on other officials, divesting this man of God only of dignity. Mr. Heller's heart is no doubt in the right place; the trouble is with his head and the current notions which have added it.

"Catch-22" is immoral in the way of so much contemporary fiction and drama in being inclusively, almost absent-mindedly, anti-institutional. This quality has become so pervasive that it now evades recognition. The codes of conduct subtending such institutions as marriage and family life are treated casually as if nonexistent or vestigial. Acts of adultery are

presented as if it would occur to no one to object, with the betrayed partner usually the unsympathetic party—a natural concomitant of the new literary form of betrothal, not an exchange of vows but getting into bed. Indulgence emerges as a new ideal, with so cleanly a thing as sexuality consistently dirtied by association with ideas of violence, prowess, and proof of normality, and divorce from ideas of procreation or tenderness. By a new kind of stock response, profanity and obscenity are accepted as signature of the literature of the elect, reverberating more loudly in theatres than in bars. Every observant reader must be familiar with the mounting insistence with which he is made to stare at the same graffiti scrawled on different walls. In 1955 as distinct from 1961 the nation was not “ready” for “Catch-22.”

It now requires considerable temerity to write words like the above; they have become the only kind *unprintable* in literary media. The new conformity is there with its bludgeon, and hordes of hack reviewers ready to step forth valiantly to defend the autonomy of the artist. The question is, where is the autonomy and where are the artists? The lock-step is the lock-step, whether the march is forward or backward. Books are immoral if they condone immoral behavior inadvertently or otherwise. Because legal censorship of seriously intended works is wrong, as most intelligent men agree, it does not follow that moral considerations should be barred from critical discussion. If a book like “Catch-22” is offensive, we should say so. Even now aspiring English majors at New York University must be ungirding their loins to “top” the performance of the distinguished alumnus. They are certainly doing so elsewhere. A considerable share of the responsibility lies with educators too tired to fight for their standards of art, taste, and morality, or too flaccid ever to have had any.

“Catch-22” is immoral because it follows a fashion in spitting indiscriminately at business and the professions, at respectability, at ideals, at all visible tokens of superiority. It is a leveling book in the worst sense, leveling everything and everyone downward. It is chilling to observe the compulsive love of destruction that has gone into this presumed protest against the destructiveness of war. The only surviving values are self-preservation, satisfaction of animal appetite, and a sentimental conception of “goodness of heart.” The “sane” view is live-and-let-live, as if it were as simple as that, and men had never died so that others might live. By stacking the cards so clumsily that they clatter, Mr. Heller is able to demonstrate that Yossarian does right by deserting: “That crazy bastard

may be the only sane one left" (109)—except for the other deserter, Orr. Selden Rodman says in his piece, "The preposterous morality of this world passes in review." Observe the grand inclusiveness. Presumably no distinction exists between the morality of the Nazis, who murdered non-Nordic countrymen because they were non-Nordics, and the morality of the Danes, who rescued non-Nordic countrymen because they were human beings—all the morality "of this world" is equally "preposterous." The American effort which Mr. Heller "satirizes" was not a crusade, but some Americans who died in it, perhaps even a few colonels, fought as they did because they hated cruelty. It is easy enough to be "sane" in a simple world of self, where the value of all actions can be judged in terms of personal convenience. Sanity of Mr. Heller's brand was evidently on the increase in Korea, among those who sold out their fellow prisoners for an extra handful of rice.

If it seems that this book is being taken too seriously—just a first book, and one that tries to be funny—have we not been told that it is "an intensely serious work" (Brustein)? When it was more recently advertised, the "sixth printing" was mentioned (with the usual reticence about the size of the printings), but the full page ads and the promises of dirt and delight have not yet succeeded in jacking it into the best seller lists in this country. The promoters claim to have done so in England, and this is not implausible. It has an ersatz American quality, like those imitations of hound-dog singing now making British music halls hideous. Europe has always imported our more dubious cultural products, and is in the market for surplus Beatism. Philip Toynbee has boarded the "Catch-22" bandwagon—"the greatest satirical work in English since 'Erewhon.'" When the publishers run out of American boosters, there will always be an Englishman. The number of printings, six or six hundred, is quite immaterial—the book is what it is. Its author should know that there are some of us who see no distinction between a fraudulent military success like his Colonel Cathcart's and a fraudulent literary success like his own.

My final admonitions will be constructive. If Mr. Heller wishes to be a humorist, let him relax. There is more humor, even more satire, in a strip of the cartoon "Peanuts" than in the whole of "Catch-22." If he wishes to strike a blow against atomic extinction, let him read Elizabeth Thomas's "The Harmless People." This simple descriptive report might teach him how to be an artist without going into convulsions, and what it is like to be human. Thomas's African bushmen I am willing to strive to save.

Heller's Americans make me feel that atomic extinction is inevitable and not especially undesirable. Or if he wants an example of how appalling material can be used as a power for good, let him read Kamala Markandaya's "Nectar in a Sieve." The author's purely literary endowment may be no greater than his own, although that is hard to conceive, but she has the capacity for selfless absorption in the lives of others, and her book erased in a single evening my prejudice against a people. Incidentally there is a prostitute in this novel whose story might encourage Mr. Heller to think a little about the background of his bouncing Italians. Finally, if he wishes a tip on how words may be artfully repeated, and on how a really good propagandist persuades men to pick up the pieces, let him read the following: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things." I recommend the words also to his reviewers.





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